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Second in Command

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

ROBERT MARSHALL

PRICE ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE NET.

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THE SECOND IN COMMAND

Produced on Tuesday, November 27, 1900, at the Haymarket Theatre, London, with the following cast:—

Colonel Anstruther, D.S.O.	10th Dragoon Guards	*Mr. Alan Aynesworth.*
Major Bingham		*Mr. Cyril Maude.*
Sir Walter Mannering (Lieut.)		*Mr. Herbert Sleath.*
Peter Barker		*Mr. G. M. Graham.*
Medenham (Mess Waiter)		*Mr. G. Hugh Oughterson.*
Hartopp (Colonel's Servant)		*Mr. George Trollope.*
Corporal		*Mr. Alec Hunt*
Orderly		*Mr. H. Royle.*
Sergeant		*Mr. Dale.*
Adjutant (no part)		*Mr. Sydney Hamilton.*
Subaltern (no part)		*Mr. Rutherford.*
Hildebrand Carstairs		*Mr. Vane-Tempest.*
Mr. Fenwick		*Mr. Clarence Blakiston.*
Duke of Hull		*Mr. Wilfrid Forster*
Lady Harburgh		*Miss Fanny Coleman.*
Muriel Mannering		*Miss Sybil Carlisle.*
Norah Vining		*Miss Muriel Beaumont.*

Two A.D.C.'s. Soldiers.

ACT I

THE ANTE-ROOM OF THE OFFICERS' MESS, 10TH DRAGOON GUARDS, LOWCHESTER.

It is 3 *p.m. on a sunny day in August.*

ACT II

COLONEL ANSTRUTHER'S QUARTERS.

After dinner.

ACT III

THE SAME SCENE AS ACT I, BUT DISMANTLED.

ACT IV

TRAFALGAR COTTAGE, PORTSMOUTH.

A year has elapsed.

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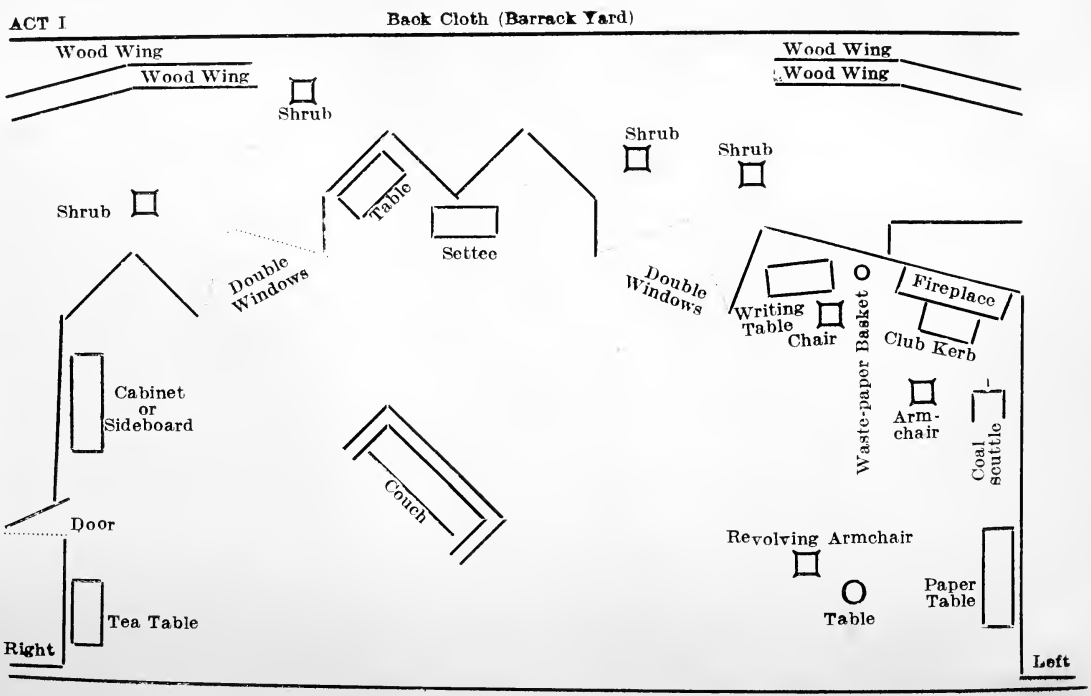
PROPERTIES

ACT I

Pink 'Un, *Punch*, and newspapers on paper table on left.
Salver on paper table on left.
Glass on mantelpiece on left, also glass on sideboard on right.
Letters in rack on cabinet on right.
Cigars and cigarettes in cabinet on right.
Brandy and soda and glasses off stage on right.
Whisky and soda and glasses off stage on right.
Trouser clips for Hildebrand.
Official papers (blue) for signature, off stage on right, ready for Orderly Officer.
Electric bell right of fireplace.
Writing table with notepaper, pens, blotter, etc.
Medenham on right (off stage) with tea tray containing tea-pot, cups and saucers, sugar, and milk jug.
Medenham's second entry on R. with jug hot water on salver.
Hartopp on R. with cake stand.
Newspapers off stage.
Photo album at table left.
Imitation hoofs and bits.
Imitation trotting.


ACT I
Back Cloth (Barrack Yard)
Wood Wing
Wood Wing
Shrub
Wood Wing
Wood Wing
Shrub
Shrub
Shrub
Table
Settee
Double Windows
Double Windows
Writing Table
Chair
Waste-paper Basket
Fireplace
Club Kerb
Arm-chair
Coal scuttle
Cabinet or Sideboard
Couch
Door
Tea Table
Right
Revolving Armchair
Table
Paper Table
Left

THE SECOND IN COMMAND

ACT I.

SCENE.—*The ante-room of the Officers' Mess, 10th Dragoon Guards, at Lowchester.*

It is 3 p.m. on a sunny day in August.

(*Music to take up curtain. As curtain rises, discovered* MAJOR BINGHAM *sprawling on couch* R., *holding a copy of the "Pink 'Un" in his hand and smoking a cigar—his eyes closed. Two* OFFICERS *are in window up* C. *smoking, one in window is telling story to one in room, who is on the* R. *of window, who laughs, smacks his leg with cane, and moves to* L. *of window.* BARKER *is asleep in armchair before fire. His legs on the fire squat, newspaper in his hand.* MEDENHAM *is at table down* L., *he picks up salver—goes to fire, gets glass off shelf—goes up* R. C. *as* BARKER *speaks, he stops surprised, then gets glass from up* R. *and exit down* R.)

N.B.—All Officers are in cavalry undress uniform and wear white gloves and carry canes; BARKER *in*

addition wears a sword and belt, which signifies that he is an Orderly Officer.)

Barker. (*stretching himself*) What ho! Binks) (*looking over to* R.)

(Medenham *looks surprised at* Barker *and exits* R.

Binks! I say, what ho!

(*The two* Officers *exeunt* C. *to* R. *and are seen passing window* R.)

Bingham. (*sits up*) Who's that calling Binks?

Barker. It's I, Barker.

Bingham. Oh, is it? Then I'll trouble you not to do it again. I don't know what the devil the army's coming to. You—a newly-joined subaltern fresh from the nursery—dare to address me—a Major in your own regiment—as "Binks"? What the deuce d'you mean, sir?

Barker. I'm awfully sorry, Major, I didn't think you'd mind. As for "newly joined," you forget that I've got fifteen months' service.

Bingham. Fifteen months, ye gods! And I've served fifteen years.

Barker. You don't look it, sir.

Bingham. What's that? You mean to tell me—eh? Well, no—I suppose I do look rather young.

Barker. Anyhow, sir, I never meant to be familiar. But the other night you asked me to call you Binks.

Bingham. Did I; when?

BARKER. The night I saw you to your quarters. The night I took your boots off.

BINGHAM. I don't remember that.

BARKER. No, sir.

BINGHAM. No. The art of forgetting is the basis of diplomacy, and any reference to midnight adventures with a field officer's boots is indiscreet.

BARKER. (*advances*) Well, sir, I never meant——

BINGHAM. It's all right, old boy! You're a good little chap and I'm very fond of you.

BARKER. And we're all devoted to you, sir. In fact, we all wish that you had got command of the regiment instead of Anstruther.

BINGHAM. That may be, my boy, but you oughtn't to say so. It's your business and mine to be loyal to our chief.

BARKER. (*takes up his cap from chair* L. C.) Well, he's a bit of a martinet, anyhow. D'ye know he makes the orderly officer inspect the picquet at night and collect the reports at watch sitting? (*puts cap on*)

BINGHAM. And do you young devils a lot of good. Besides, Anstruther's a splendid fellow—D.S.O. and all that sort of thing. He's an old Eton and Sandhurst pal of mine, and I know him. Of course I should have liked the command, but—well—there you are!

BARKER. (*goes to table* L.) Poor old Binks!

BINGHAM. (*turns to him*) Did I hear you say "Binks" again?

Barker. Not I, Major! Good heavens, no, sir!

Bingham. (*reclines*) Right! I thought you did. No, I'll never get command of the regiment. They'll pass me over every time.

Barker. (*comes up* L.) But why, Major? (*sits on arm of chair* L. C.)

Bingham. The War Office knows me. They've watched me on parade. They've seen me tie up the regiment into the most awful knots. Shocking, I assure you! Once I had command of a brigade at the manœuvres.

Barker. And what happened?

Bingham. I marched two regiments along a wrong road and we were lost for eight hours. It concluded operations for the day. It's not a thing to laugh at, you know.

(Barker *laughs and goes up into window* R.)

Besides, I was a very junior Major then, and couldn't be expected to know very much. But anyhow, my dear boy, a failure as I may be in a military sense, I'm not a bounder.

Barker. No, and that's such a comfort for the ratepayers.

Bingham. (*sits up*) Yes, they like the genus "gentleman." His existence is one of the superstitions of the working classes.

Barker. (*looks up* R.) Hallo, there's Mannering, back from the Riviera.

Bingham. Where's he been?

BARKER. Nice, he said; but I'll bet he went to Monte Carlo. He's a born gambler.

BINGHAM. (*rises*) Ordered back, I suppose? (*goes to fireplace, takes "Pink 'Un"*)

BARKER. (*comes down* R. *a little*) Yes, active service being in the air, the Colonel wired him to return at once. (*gets cigarette case from sideboard* R.)

BINGHAM. And you think the young scamp has been at the tables, eh? 'Pon my soul, it's too bad of him. Look at that dear sister of his. (*flicks cigar ash into fire*)

BARKER. (*sits on back of couch*) What? Muriel?

BINGHAM. (*turns*) Eh?

BARKER. (*slightly abashed*) Muriel—Muriel Mannering.

BINGHAM. So you use the Christian name of ladies, do you, and in the mess too? Now look here, young Barker, I'm very fond of you, and you're a good little chap, but I will not stand your speaking of Miss Mannering as "Muriel." And I've a reason—

(BARKER *comes to back of armchair* L. C.)

a very special reason. I give it you in absolute confidence.

(BARKER *leans on chair back.*)

For the past two years, annually, I have asked Miss Mannering to marry me.

(BARKER *steps back, surprised.*)

I admit that so far the result has been an annual repulse. But under the circumstances, if your

society small talk must include reference to that lady, you will be good enough to use the prefix "Miss." (*goes down to table* L., *places cane and gloves down*)

Barker. I'm awfully sorry, Major! And I wish you every success.

Bingham. (*takes up "Punch," puts "Pink 'Un," down*) It's no good. I've no luck. All my life I've blazed away cartridges, but I can't ring the bells or win the nuts. She'd never accept me. It would be absurd if she did. I know that.

Barker. Yes, sir, but she needn't. (*seeing his mistake, goes up* C.)

Bingham. What the dev—shut up! Here's her brother. (*up to fire*)

(*Enter through window* Lieut. Sir Walter Mannering.)

Barker. What ho, Manners!

Mannering. Hallo, Tins! Good-morning, Major (*salutes*)

Bingham. Good-morning. Back to the army again, eh?

Mannering. Yes, for as long as they'll have me. And that—if I'm any judge of these—(*holding out letters*) won't be long.

Barker. Bills, eh? (*crosses to* R., *lights cigarette*)

Mannering. Worse! Writs—County Court summons. You know!

Bingham. I know 'em! Faultless documents from the point of view of grammar, but as contri-

butions to literature neither mellifluous in phrase nor altruistic in tone. And their moral is so hackneyed. (*lays "Punch" on squat* R.) I always think the proper cemetery for such documents as those is the waste-paper basket. (*laughs*) Here you are. (*handing waste-paper basket to* MANNERING. What are you doing in uniform?

MANNERING. (*sits* R., *places cane and gloves on couch* R.) I had to report myself at the orderly room on arrival.

BINGHAM. And how's your sister?

MANNERING. I can't tell you that, sir. I only got back half an hour ago. Haven't you seen her?

BINGHAM. Oh yes, every day lately.

MANNERING. Then, my dear Major, why ask me?

BINGHAM. Well—the topic sprang up—that's all.

(*Enter* MEDENHAM.)

MANNERING. Get me a brandy and soda.

MEDENHAM. A large one, sir?

MANNERING. Yes, a large brandy and a small soda.

(MEDENHAM *is going.*)

The old brandy.

BARKER. And bring the cigarettes.

MEDENHAM. Yes, sir.

(*Exit* R.)

BINGHAM. Now look here, Mannering, you're a

good chap, and I'm very fond of you, but I won't have you drinking brandy at three o'clock in the day.

Barker. Yes, I call it rot.

Bingham. Oh, you do, do you? Well, I've told you that you're a good little chap and that I'm very fond of you, but don't interfere.

Barker. Sorry, sir.

Mannering. It's all right, Major. I want a bit of bucking up. I've had the most appalling luck that any man could not knock against. You see, I drifted to Monte Carlo.

Bingham. Aha, I said so. I knew you would. Didn't I, Barker?

Barker. Yes, Major.

Bingham. An odd sort of drifting. Sixty miles an hour in the train-de-luxe.

(*Enter* Medenham *with tray.*)

(*as* Medenham *is about to pour out soda*) That's not for Sir Walter, waiter.

Medenham. No, sir?

Bingham. No, he ordered it for me.

Medenham. Yes, sir. (*comes to up* L. C., *hands drink to* Major, *then cigarettes to* Barker.)

Bingham. Thank you. (*to* Mannering) Chin. chin! (*drinks*)

(*Exit* Medenham *behind couch down* R.)

Mannering. I say, Major, why did you do that?

Bingham. For two reasons. You're young and the brandy's old. (*drinks*) And you know the

result of putting old wine into young bottles. (*drinks*) Now tell me what took you to Monte Carlo at this time of the year? It must have been empty. (*places glass on mantelshelf, sits on squat*)

Mannering. Yes, only two tables going. And the emptiness of the place was horribly infectious. My pockets got the disease badly.

Barker. What, broke?

Mannering. Yes, I'll have to send in my papers. They'll never let me go out to South Africa with the regiment. I couldn't get out of the country.

Bingham. (*comes down* L. *with* "*Punch*") My dear boy, is it really as bad as that? (*sits in low chair*)

Mannering. Yes, I'm afraid it is. I've one chance left. You—you know Fenwick, the solicitor in the town?

Bingham. I know. He's dined here once or twice, hasn't he?

Mannering. Yes, he's not a bad sort, and I believe does a little money-lending on the quiet. I fancy he's a Jew.

Bingham. Oh, no! His father was, but he's chucked it.

(*All laugh.*)

Mannering. I've asked him to look me up to-day, and if he can't help me—well—I'm done for.

Barker. My dear old fellow, I—I am sorry.

Mannering. It's all right, Tins. I deserve it.

But I swear I'll get out to South Africa somehow, if I have to send in my papers and enlist in another regiment.

Bingham. Yes, that sounds very fine and heroic. At your age I used to say the same. And yet when the dinner call goes, you'll always find me near the flesh pots. Besides, what about your people?

Mannering. People? I haven't got any. At least, only my sister—Muriel.

Bingham. Good heavens! Isn't she enough? And one day she'll marry and then you'll have a brother-in-law to consider. And I'd expect a good deal——

Mannering. You would?

Bingham. No, he would. What the devil are you talking about?

Mannering. Well, my dear Major, you——

(*Enter* Colonel Anstruther. *All stand and salute.*)

Anstruther. No, please don't get up. (*to* Mannering) So you're back, Mannering?

(Barker *sits again.*)

Mannering. Yes, sir.

(Bingham *goes up* L., *puts "Punch" down.*)

Anstruther. I was sorry to recall you so suddenly.

Mannering. I knew it couldn't be helped, sir.

Anstruther. By the way, I've had a note from Lady Harburgh. She wants to bring your sister and Miss Vining to barracks to-day to see the tent-

pegging, and I've said we'll be delighted: I asked them to come here to the mess, so that we can give them tea. I suppose nobody objects?

Bingham No one, Colonel. } (*together*)
and }
Barker. Pleasure, sir. }

Anstruther. Then, Barker, like a good fellow, just let the mess sergeant know, will you?

Barker. (*rises*) Certainly, sir. (*takes cane and gloves from table up* L. C.)

(*Exit up* R.)

Anstruther. And, Mannering, you'll present me to your sister, won't you? We've never met, and she ought to know your new Colonel, eh?

Mannering. Of course, sir. I'll change at once, and keep a look-out for them.

(*Exit* Mannering.)

Anstruther. (*places letter on mantelshelf up* L.) Nice lot of lads, these subalterns. I've only been in the regiment a fortnight, but I like the cut of them.

Bingham. Yes, they're good boys. (*takes up cane and gloves*)

Anstruther. Gad, Kit! To be that age again!

Bingham. (*crosses in front to* R.) Ah, there you are! The golden age when Cupid is the servile valet of the young. Now that our hair is touched with grey, he's become an impertinent lackey, always giving notice. (*sits on centre of couch* R.)

Anstruther. (*comes* r.) Kit—I—I always wanted to speak to you about my being brought in and given command of the regiment over your head. You've forgiven me that, haven't you? (*slaps* Bingham *on back and sits on* l. *end of sofa*)

Bingham. Why, of course I have! Surely we're old enough chums for that to be understood. Besides, you're a smart soldier with a reputation, and I'm a duffer without one. Even the War Office has unaccountable fits of observation.

Anstruther. I don't know why, but since I've come here you've seemed down on your luck.

Bingham. Well—I am, more or less. I'm in love.

Anstruther. In love, Kit?

Bingham. Yes, third year. Awful, isn't it?

Anstruther. And who is the lucky girl?

Bingham. She's a girl that won't look her luck in the face. That's the trouble. (*leans back*)

Anstruther. A trouble I've never had to tackle. Isn't it odd, Kit? Of course I've sown my wild oats, but love—real love—has never touched me. It's the great gap of my life.

Bingham. My gap is all the other way. She knows that. But fill it up for me. Oh, dear no! I know of no more selfish creature than a girl who isn't in love with—well—with a man who's in love with her.

Anstruther. Still, you know, it's better to have loved and lost——

Bingham. (*sits up*) Ah, but is it? Remember

that was said by a poet. He was catering for his own class. A poet wants everything vaguely, but he shies at anything definite, except royalties. Now that's no good for a full-blooded soldier. (*leans back*) If I'm nothing else I'm that.

ANSTRUTHER. You'll always be the same, Kit, always the best of sorts. (*slaps* BINGHAM *on back, then goes up to card rack up* L.)

BINGHAM. Best of sorts; yes, isn't it your experience that "awful good sorts" never come to anything?

ANSTRUTHER. Some day your luck will turn. (*takes up newspaper*)

BINGHAM. (*leans forward*) I wonder! (*rises*) One never knows, perhaps it may. (*comes to fire*) If by any chance it does turn, Miles, will you do me a favour?

ANSTRUTHER. Yes, of course.

BINGHAM. Then, in the event of any misguided young woman deluding herself into the belief that I am an eligible person, you won't mind being my best man, will you? (*tilts at back of armchair with his cane and laughs shyly*)

ANSTRUTHER. I'll be delighted, Kit. (*up to fire*)

BINGHAM. Thanks! That's always something. (*going up* R. C.) You get a tie-pin or a cigarette case, I believe. The sort of things one always loses. It's just as well to have things cut and dried.

(HILDEBRAND CARSTAIRS *appears at the window* R.)

Hildebrand. May I come in, Major?

Bingham. Why—Carstairs? Of course, come in. How are you?

Hildebrand. Oh, I suppose I'm all right. Mother and the two girls are driving over. I biked.

Bingham. (*going up* R.) Then I'll be off to change. (*stops—aside*) By the way, you haven't met our new chief, have you?

Hildebrand. No!

Bingham. Then I'll introduce you. Colonel, d'you know Mr. Carstairs, Lady Harburgh's son? (*stands at window up* R., *anxious to go*)

Anstruther. How d'you do, Mr. Carstairs? (*shakes hands*)

Hildebrand. I think I'm all right, thanks. (*sits on end of sofa* R. C.)

Anstruther. You'd better be off, Bingham. I'll look after Mr. Carstairs.

Bingham. Thanks, Colonel.

(*Exit* Major Bingham *through window* R.)

Anstruther. Your mother, I believe, has shown the regiment a great deal of hospitality.

Hildebrand. (*taking off clip from trousers*) Yes, she wants to get the girls married.

Anstruther. (*laughs quietly*) Oh, that's it, is it? (*goes to fire*)

Hildebrand. D'you know, I seem to have seen you before, somewhere.

Anstruther. That's quite possible.

Hildebrand. (*comes to* L. C.) Oh, now I remember! Wasn't your portrait in last year's Academy, with lots of medals and the D.S.O. (*sits on arm of chair* L. C.)

Anstruther. You're quite right.

Hildebrand. It was called "Portrait of an Officer." Why didn't they give your name in the catalogue?

Anstruther. Well—I'd just been decorated, and I didn't want to advertise. I know it's the thing to do nowadays. I mean the sending of premature and, if possible, humorous telegrams about oneself from the seat of war; but I'm rather a Conservative, and I told the artist to keep my identity out of the catalogue.

Hildebrand. What an odd idea. I'd have my name all over the place.

Anstruther. At your age, perhaps. Tell me, are you going in for the army?

Hildebrand. In a sense I am. I've failed three times. I shall probably end in the diplomatic service.

Anstruther. That's not an easy business.

Hildebrand. Isn't it? Well then, I'll have a shot at the Cape Mounted Police. It's a matter of indifference to me.

Anstruther. And to them, I imagine.

Hildebrand. Possibly! I really don't know.

Anstruther. You might try Parliament. It's one of the paradoxes of our glorious constitution

that Parliament being the supreme department of government, no intellectual test is necessary for membership.

Hildebrand. I thought of going on the stage, only it seems hardly fair to let one's social status snatch the bread and butter from the mouths of our great actors.

(*Sounds of* Men *marching heard off* R.)

Anstruther. I don't imagine the "great actor" would resent your competing.

Hildebrand. One never knows. They're so awfully sensitive—in public.

(Orderly *appears at window with papers, up* R.)

Anstruther. Well, what is it?

Orderly. Papers for your signature, sir.

Anstruther. Ah, just take them through to the office.

Voice. (*off* R.) Left, left, left, right, etc.

Anstruther. You'll excuse me, Mr. Carstairs, won't you? Order anything you wish. There's the bell. (*goes into window* C.)

Hildebrand. Thanks awfully.

Anstruther. (*looks off to* R.) Now then, Sergeant, look at those men all over the place.

Voice. (*off*) Squad, Halt!

(*Marching ceases.*)

Hildebrand. (*up* R. C.) Squad, Halt! That's

the sort of thing that makes one long to be a soldier; I don't know what it means, but it sounds impressive.

(*Exit* ANSTRUTHER L.)

(*An* OFFICER *crosses from* L. *to* R.)

HILDEBRAND. (*comes* L. C.) Yes, I think a libation to the gods, (*rings bell*) so long as mother doesn't turn up inconveniently. The only girl I care (*sits on squat*) for has been upsetting me again. Norah won't take me seriously.

(*Enter* MEDENHAM, R.)

May I have a whisky and soda, please, and a strong cigar?

MEDENHAM. Yes, sir.

(*Exit* R.)

HILDEBRAND. I wonder if I could get into the Royal Irish Constabulary.

(*Sound of laughter.*)

Oh, Lord, here they are.

(*Enter* LADY HARBURGH, NORAH VINING, *followed by* MURIEL MANNERING.)

LADY HARBURGH. Oh, here you are.

NORAH. Oh, actually here's Hildebrand.

LADY HARBURGH. Understand me clearly, Norah, I will not have you kissing your hand, as you did to a group of young subalterns. We don't do that sort of thing in England.

Norah. No, aunt, it would have no effect if you did.

Hildebrand. Besides, you're supposed to be engaged to me, in a half and half sort of way, isn't she, mother?

Lady Harburgh. To a certain extent, experimentally. (*sits couch* R. C.)

(Hildebrand *goes up* L., *talks with* Muriel.)

Norah. What a happy girl I ought to be. (*sits on back of couch* R.)

Lady Harburgh. You have no sense of your obligations. Merely because my poor sister married your father——

Norah. Remember—my father had a temper and I inherit it.

Lady Harburgh. It was in the hope of eradicating that failing that you were sent to Paris to be "finished."

Norah. Finished—morally?

Lady Harburgh. Er—partly.

Norah. Then they haven't succeeded—I feel as if I'd only just begun.

Lady Harburgh. So I begin to fear. But I am a Maclachlan of the Hebrides and given to plain speaking. And I shall insist on decorous behaviour on your part. English cavalry barracks are not like Paris on a public holiday.

(Hildebrand *stands looking into fire*, Muriel *looks off* C.)

NORAH. Oh, Mon Dieu! As if I didn't know that!

LADY HARBURGH. There again, I forbid you to use that expression. Translated into English it is reserved exclusively for intoxicated members of the lower classes.

(*Enter* MEDENHAM R. *with tray, large glass, whisky and soda, box of cigars.*)

MEDENHAM. (*going to* HILDEBRAND) Whisky and soda, sir.

HILDEBRAND. (*turns*) For me? Oh dear me, not for me. (*step down to* L.)

MEDENHAM. You ordered it, sir.

HILDEBRAND. Not I!

LADY HARBURGH. Take it, Hildebrand.

(*He does so sheepishly.*)

MEDENHAM. Strong cigar, sir.

HILDEBRAND. No, thank you, not for me.

MEDENHAM. You ordered it, sir.

HILDEBRAND. No, not I!

LADY HARBURGH. Take it, Hildebrand. (*he does so*)

(*Exit* MEDENHAM *in front of couch down* R. HILDEBRAND *about to drink.*)

Now, how dare you?

HILDEBRAND. I—I haven't been feeling very strong lately—I—— (*going to drink*)

LADY HARBURGH. Pour it into the coal scuttle.

Hildebrand. But, my dear mother—really——
(*about to drink*)

Lady Harburgh. Do as I bid you!

(*He goes to scuttle up* L. *opens it—turns and looks at* Lady Harburgh, *who stands waiting. He empties glass into scuttle.*)

Now give me the cigar.

(*He gives it.*)

Never forget that I am a Maclachlan of the Hebrides. And now, what do you mean by this clandestine dissipation?

Hildebrand. If I'm being driven to excess, it's Norah. And, little as she knows it, it's an exceedingly easy road to travel, especially in hot weather.

Norah. Billy, how dare you?

Hildebrand. I ask you, are we engaged or are we not?

Norah. Only as a sort of trial trip.

Hildebrand. Then why does she want to come here to barracks instead of biking with me?

Norah. Because I get such a lot of you at home. It's like having mutton every day for weeks, without even pickles.

Hildebrand. No. It's because you want to make sheep's eyes at Barker.

Norah. I don't make sheep's eyes.

Hildebrand. Yes, you do.

Norah. I haven't got sheep's eyes.

Hildebrand. I didn't say you had.

Norah. You only said that because I said you were like mutton.

Hildebrand. Yes, you have when—when Barker's about.

Both. You have—I haven't.

(*Exeunt both* r., *heard off arguing.*)

Lady Harburgh. (*crosses to* r.) Silence, both of you! A most trying couple. Hildebrand tells me that your brother, Walter, is back from the Riviera. (*sits on couch* r.)

Muriel. (*comes down* l. c.) Yes, we'll see him to-day.

Lady Harburgh. I can't imagine how he can afford trips of that sort. He has barely enough to live on in the regiment. And then, Muriel, it's my duty to tell you that I really cannot be expected to provide you with a home for ever. Your mother was a very dear friend, and for her sake I took you in. I was glad to have you as a companion for Norah. But that was two years ago, and really, dear, I did look to your getting married long before this.

Muriel. I'm very, very sorry, Lady Harburgh. If there is any place I could go to, or any employment—— (*sits on chair down* l. c.)

Lady Harburgh. My dear girl, you have a profession already; and that is to marry. I've given you every opportunity. You had the season in town. My house has been Liberty Hall to the entire

garrison. It absolutely reeks of pipeclay and echoes with the clank of spurs. Yet what is the result?

Muriel. None!

Lady Harburgh. Exactly—none. Well, Muriel, I really must ask you to make an effort. There's Major Bingham. Everybody says he's devoted to you.

Muriel. Yes, I think he is.

Lady Harburgh. Then you must give him his opportunity. Love, especially slightly middle-aged love, must be nurtured gently but inexorably.

Muriel. It isn't that. He has already asked me to marry him.

Lady Harburgh. What?

Muriel. Yes, twice.

Lady Harburgh. And you refused?

Muriel. Yes.

Lady Harburgh. Then I call it positively improvident of you, almost improper. He's just the man to secure in case of a rainy day.

Muriel. I couldn't, Lady Harburgh. I know what a dear delightful soul he is—but—well—I don't love him.

Lady Harburgh. My dear Muriel, love is a luxury that only the moderately rich or extremely poor can properly indulge in. And now—all of a sudden—I learn from your own lips that you might have married some months ago. I'm not a rich woman, Muriel, and I do think you might have spared me these months of unnecessary expense.

Muriel. Expense? But surely you receive an annual sum of money on my behalf?

Lady Harburgh. No, my dear. So it was arranged by the lawyers when your father died. But it soon appeared there was barely enough to keep Walter in the regiment.

Muriel. And I was never told!

Lady Harburgh. I thought it better not to. I felt sure you would marry——

Muriel. You needn't say anything more, Lady Harburgh. I need scarcely tell you that I knew nothing of this. I'm very grateful, most grateful for all you've done, and I promise you that, whether I marry or not, in a few weeks' time I shall relieve you of any further burden.

Lady Harburgh. There is no immediate hurry, Muriel.

Muriel. Yes, Lady Harburgh, in my heart there is—a feverish—desperate hurry.

Lady Harburgh. I had no desire to wound you.

Muriel. No, but I am wounded, most sorely wounded. I—I can't help it.

(*Enter up* r. Major Bingham *in mufti. Breeches, gaiters, cap.*)

Bingham. (*cap in hand*) So sorry, Lady Harburgh. We didn't expect you quite so early.

Lady Harburgh. It is the unexpected that happens, but only to the unprepared. A point that seems to have escaped our military authorities.

BINGHAM. Yes. That's very good. (*goes to* L.) How do you do, Miss Mannering?

MURIEL. How do you do? (*going up* L.) Is Walter in barracks?

BINGHAM. Yes, he'll be here in a moment. (*going up* C.) He's just gone——

LADY HARBURGH. (R. C.) Major Bingham! Major—I want to——

BINGHAM. (*comes down* L. C.) Yes? You want to speak to me?

LADY HARBURGH. (*both over* L.) Charming, charming girl, Muriel. (*looks up* R.)

BINGHAM. She is indeed. In fact, telling her so is rather a hobby of mine.

LADY HARBURGH. She *likes* you.

BINGHAM. Yes, lots of people like me; the trouble is they never get any forrader. They all get swamped in a platonic bog. (*goes* L.)

(*Enter* SIR WALTER MANNERING *up* R., *in mufti.*)

MANNERING. Well, Muriel? Here I am, back again.

(*They kiss.*)

MURIEL. Walter, dear!

BINGHAM. (*goes up* L. *to* MURIEL) Your brother is looking very well after his trip?

MANNERING. (*down* R. C.) How d'ye do, Lady Harburgh?

(*They shake hands.*)

Lady Harburgh. Well, I haven't quite recovered from the effects of the season in town. Society is such a muddle of birth, brains, money and over eating, that it's really exhausting. I saw by the papers you'd gone to Nice.

Mannering. Yes. Though what interest the papers find in that, I can't imagine.

Lady Harburgh. No! You see, nowadays only the very nicest people, quite the inner circle, contrive to keep out of the newspapers.

(Lady Harburgh *goes up extreme* R. Bingham *crosses to* R. *at back. They meet.*)

Bingham. You drove over, eh, Lady Harburgh?

(*They move up to* C. *chatting.*)

Muriel. And you enjoyed Nice, Walter?

(*Both a little* L. C.)

Mannering. H'm! Not altogether.

Muriel. There's nothing wrong, is there?

Mannering. No, at least—well, it doesn't matter! (*moves to* R.) It's all in the day's work.

(*Horses heard trotting in distance.*)

Muriel. I wish you'd tell me, Walter. We seem so alone in the world, you and I.

Mannering. (*comes to her*) Dear old girl! It's all right. Cheer up! (*patting her arms*) Ah! There go (*up* R. C.) the first lot to the field.

Lady Harburgh. (*goes into window* R.) Then

take me there, Sir Walter, will you? I've never seen pig-sticking.

Bingham and Mannering. (*together laughingly*) Pig-sticking!

Lady Harburgh. No, no, I mean tent-pegging.

(*All laugh.*)

(*Exit* R.)

(*Trotting dies away.*)

Mannering. (*going off* R.) Pleasure! Binks, you'll bring Muriel, won't you?

(*Exit* R.)

Bingham. Yes, of course. Delighted! (*comes to* R. C.) Miss Mannering—— (*fidgets with his cap*)

(Muriel *turns to him.*)

If you can spare me a moment, I should much like to refer to a subject we have so far discussed annually.

Muriel. Yes, I think I understand. (*sits* R. *on couch*)

Bingham. We are going on active service.

Muriel. I know.

Bingham. And sometimes—well, some of us don't come back.

Muriel. Ah, don't, Major Bingham! Let us look on the bright side of things while we may.

Bingham. Yes, that's my own idea. But I doubt if I'm so highly polished as to have a bright side.

Muriel. Of course I shall always follow your career—and Walter's with the greatest interest—indeed with more than that. When you are undergoing hardships, I shall suffer with you; when you win laurels, none will be prouder than I—for—for I know how good and loyal you are.

Bingham. Loyal? To the country?

Muriel. To everything that is good.

Bingham. Thanks! That's something. But here we are again in the same old platonic cul-de-sac.

Muriel. You'll look after Walter, won't you?

Bingham. Yes, rather, as if he were my brother-(*sits by her*) in-law.

Muriel. Somehow I seem to have realized only to-day, how alone we are, Walter and I.

Bingham. Ah, there you are. Well now—suppose you took me into partnership? If I were there, you need never be alone.

Muriel. No, that's just it. One might want to be, you know.

Bingham. In that case, I could go away for a day or two.

Muriel. I'm afraid that arrangement wouldn't mean happiness, either for you or for me.

Bingham. Not happiness for me! Why, Muriel——

(Muriel *looks up.*)

There, forgive me, I whisper the name so often to myself that it will come to the lips—I should be a king!

(Muriel *turns away to* R.)

Ah! If you'd only let me go away with some sort of hope, some little rift of sunshine, I should be a new man, and I believe even a better soldier. It would be patriotic of you—to love me just a little. Think for a moment what a service you would be rendering the nation, if, by loving me just a little, you made me a—second—Napoleon.

Muriel. Napoleon's career ended with St. Helena.

Bingham. Then let mine begin with St. Muriel.

Muriel. But—if I can't offer you more than friendship——

Bingham. (*leans back, twirls moustache*) I know what you mean. You can't offer me more than the sort of cheap affection one might buy ready made at the Stores, using somebody else's ticket.

Muriel. You don't wish me to come to you and— (*embarrassed*) you must help me—I can't say it.

Bingham. (*leans forward*) And be my wife?

Muriel. Yes—not loving you.

Bingham I'm not at all sure I don't. But Muriel, you don't—you can't mean that you would?

Muriel. If, knowing how little I could be to you, you still wish it—yes.

Bingham. Muriel—you don't really—you can't possibly——

Muriel. Indeed, yes, I do.

Bingham. (*takes her hand*) Muriel—my darling—is it true? No, no, it can't be. You can't realize what you're saying. As a soldier you know, I don't

shine—at least not brilliantly. You didn't know that, did you?

Muriel. I only know that you're a dear kind soul, and if you believe that I can make you happy—

Bingham. Happy!

Muriel. I am willing to try.

Bingham. Happy! There isn't a man in the world that I'd change with now—there isn't. (*stops suddenly*) Did you (*turns away and twirls moustache*) know I was passed over for command of the regiment?

Muriel. Yes, I heard of it.

Bingham. I don't wish to convey the idea that I'm an embryo Wellington.

Muriel. I know you don't.

Bingham. In fact, it's just on the cards that I'm not. By the way, merely as a formal inquiry, there's no one else you have ever—ever loved, is there?

Muriel. No one, except——

Bingham. Except—good heavens—well? (*releases her hand*)

Muriel. A picture.

Bingham. A picture! Oh, we'll pass that.

Muriel. I'll be absolutely frank with you. It was the portrait of a man in last year's Academy. The moment I saw it, the face attracted me, and I went back to the Galleries many times only to look at it. It was a foolish idea, of course, but somehow we seemed gradually to know each other.

Bingham. It wasn't a living picture, by any chance?

MURIEL. No, only canvas and paint. But it spoke to me and I to it. I imagined I had drifted into love. At last, at Hurlingham, I suddenly found myself face to face with him.

BINGHAM. Oh! Did you?

MURIEL. Yes. It was only for a second, and then he was lost in the crowd.

BINGHAM. And who was he?

MURIEL. (*leans back on couch*) I couldn't find out. "Portrait of an Officer" was all the catalogue said.

BINGHAM. (*leans back, takes her hand*) Ah, well, you won't want to turn up the catalogue now, darling. We've stepped into a new art gallery, and I'm the only masterpiece in it. (*laughs shyly*) But there—you must think me horribly selfish in asking you to give up all other possible romances?

MURIEL. Not more so than I am in coming to you.

BINGHAM. Muriel—(*shyly*) you don't happen to know my Christian name, do you?

MURIEL. Yes, of course, Christopher.

BINGHAM. (*shyly*) Kit, for short.

MURIEL. Kit.

BINGHAM. Ah! How beautiful it sounds. And I used to think it ugly and familiar. Muriel—one—only one.

MURIEL. (*rises*) No, Kit, please. Not yet. (*crosses to up* C.)

BINGHAM. No, of course not. Not yet. I always was a selfish brute.

(MURIEL *offers her hand to* BINGHAM; *he kisses it.*)

MURIEL. (*thoughtfully*) For the present I think we'll tell only Walter.

BINGHAM. (R. C.) Yes—er—but suppose he asks you if you really love me, what then?

MURIEL. Then—(*pause*)—then, for both your sakes, I'll tell a snow white lie, that even angels would forgive, and say—"yes." (*offers her hand*)

BINGHAM. (*takes her hand*) That *is* good of you. D'you know you'll meet my best man to-day. (*leads her to down* L.)

MURIEL. What?

BINGHAM. Yes, I arranged it all beforehand. There's no good being rushed at the last moment. There's somebody coming.

(MURIEL *goes to* R. BINGHAM *up to fire.*)

(*Enter* MEDENHAM, R.)

Yes, I thought you'd enjoy the tent-pegging. (*to* MEDENHAM) Have they begun yet?

MEDENHAM. Yes, sir, it's half over, sir.

BINGHAM. Is it really? Then shall we go, Miss Mannering?

MURIEL. Yes. Come along.

(*Enter* HARTOPP.)

BINGHAM. I'm awfully glad you've been able to come.

(MURIEL *exits.* BINGHAM *follows.*)

MEDENHAM. I don't approve of females 'avin' the run o' the mess.

Hartopp. Ye don't say so!

Medenham. Yes, I do. I'm a Socialist, I am.

Hartopp. You mean a cove whose mind is too active to give his 'ands a chance.

Medenham. Who's the civilian bloke crossin' the square?

Hartopp. I dunno.

(Fenwick *appears at window* R.)

Fenwick. Is Sir Walter Mannering in barracks?

Hartopp. Yes, sir. 'E's at the tent-pegging.

Fenwick. Then will you let him know I'm here, please. (*places hat and stick on seat between windows* R.)

Hartopp. Yes, sir. What name shall I say?

Fenwick. Fenwick—Mr. Fenwick. (*goes down* R. C. *and up* L. C. *to fire*)

Hartopp. Yes, sir.

(*Exit up* R.)

Medenham. Paper, sir.

Fenwick. Thank you. (*sits on squat*) So you're off to South Africa shortly?

Medenham. Yes, sir. (*goes a step to* R.)

Fenwick. I suppose you're all as keen as possible?

Medenham. I believe so, sir. (*gets to* R.)

Fenwick. It's a glorious opportunity.

Medenham. Yes, sir, so the enemy seems to think. (*at door* R.)

(*Enter* Mannering, R.)

Mannering. Hallo, Fenwick, I thought I saw you crossing the barrack-square.

Fenwick. Yes, your letter seemed to me urgent, so I came at once.

Mannering. It's awfully good of you. Have a drink?

Fenwick. No, thanks.

(*Exit* Medenham, r.)

(Mannering *goes down to* r. Fenwick *comes down* l. c., *sits in low chair*; *both watch* Medenham *off.*) Well, what is it?

Mannering. It's the very devil, Fenwick. There's no good going into detail, but unless I can get £3,000 within a week, I'll have to leave the service.

Fenwick. Three thousand.

Mannering. (*sits on couch* r.) Yes, and I'll be done out of the show in South Africa.

Fenwick. And you want to raise the money?

Mannering. Yes.

Fenwick. What security can you give?

Mannering. None, absolutely none. I've lived on credit ever since I joined the regiment.

Fenwick. Then I fear I see no way of helping you. I wish I did.

Mannering. Yes, I'm sure you do.

Fenwick. Can your relatives do nothing?

Mannering. No, nothing. They wouldn't if they could. The relatives of a poor man are peculiarly distant.

Fenwick. Ah, it's a bad business. And I see no way out of it, unless—but even then——

Mannering. Unless what?

Fenwick. Well, it's a difficult thing to suggest to you, but, (*rises*) look here, suppose—I only say "suppose"—your sister were going to marry a rich man—for example, like Colonel Anstruther——

Mannering. Why do you mention him?

Fenwick. Only, that in passing the Orderly Room, I saw the Colonel, and I know he's a very rich man.

Mannering. And you mean to say that money could be raised on that, supposing it were possible?

Fenwick. I don't say it could, but it might, if he consented to—well, to countenance—any arrangement you and I might come to.

Mannering. (*rises, goes down to* R.) I see. But I haven't quite sunk to that sort of thing. And anyhow, there isn't the remotest chance of it.

Fenwick. I can't tell you how sorry I am.

Mannering. That's all right, Fenwick. It can't be helped. (*half aside*) The bill for my folly has to come in. D'you care to have a look at the tent-pegging?

Fenwick. Thanks—may I? (*looks at his watch*)

Mannering. You'll find them all in the long field. (*comes to up* C.)

Fenwick. (*goes up, gets hat, etc.*) You won't do anything rash, will you?

Mannering. No, no!

(*Exit* Fenwick *off up* R.)

At least I hope not. I don't feel as if I had the pluck to.

(*Enter* Colonel Anstruther, L. C.)

Anstruther. Who hasn't the pluck, eh? Yo 'll have lots of it when we get into line on the veldt, my boy.

Mannering. I hope so, sir.

Anstruther. Do you know, I've just seen the most perfectly charming woman! (*goes to window*)

Mannering. Really, sir?

Anstruther. Yes, look—she's standing near Lady Harburgh.

Mannering. (*going up* R. C.) Miss Vining, I suppose. (*goes to window*) Yes, there she is. She's an Irish girl, niece of Lady Harburgh's.

Anstruther. Upon my soul, Mannering, she's delightful. There, see, she's looking over here. I begin to think there is such a thing as love at first sight. Now she's talking to Lady Harburgh.

Mannering. That? Why, that's my sister.

Anstruther. What? Not Miss Vining?

Mannering. No, that's Muriel. What an odd thing. (*comes down* L. C.)

Anstruther. Odd! Why? (*comes down* C.)

Mannering. Nothing, sir—I only meant——

Anstruther. Of course, I'd never have spoken as I did, had I known she was your sister.

Mannering. Oh, that's all right, sir. (*goes up* L.)

(Major Bingham *appears up* R. *with newspaper.*)

Bingham. I say, sir—have you seen this, sir, the evening paper? (*comes down*)

Anstruther. No, what's in it?

Bingham. It says we're detailed for the next division and that we embark at Southampton in a week or two. (*gives him paper*) See, just there, sir.

Mannering. (*comes down* L. C.) By Jove! What luck!

Anstruther. Do you know, I think I'll telegraph for confirmation of this.

Bingham. Yes, sir.

Anstruther. But I'm coming back to meet your sister.

(*Exit off* R. C.)

(Bingham *goes up* C.)

Mannering. Yes, sir. I hope it's true. But journalists are so infernally imaginative.

Bingham. (*comes down* C.) Yes. They begin so young. They ought to serve a five years' apprenticeship with invisible ink. (*throws cap on couch*)

Mannering. If only I can dodge the duns!

Bingham. Dodge the duns? Nothing easier. When the tropoer's on the tide, the bailiffs shed as many tears as the girls we leave behind. Different class of "tear" perhaps, but I fancy it takes longer to dry. (*up* R.)

Mannering. What a queer thing it would be if he and Muriel—but, of course—it isn't possible.

(*Chatter heard off* R.)

Bingham. What are you mumbling about ?

Mannering. I—mumbling ? Oh, nothing. (*aside*) I'll ask the Colonel for a day's leave. I'll have a last shot at raising the wind in town.

(*Enter* Lady Harburgh, R. Muriel, Norah, Barker *and* Hildebrand. Lady Harburgh *comes down* C. *to armchair* L. C. Muriel *comes down* R., *sits on* R. *of sofa* R. Norah *sits on centre of seat up* R. C. Hildebrand *sits on her* R.)

Bingham. Ah, here you are. (*comes at back to* L. C.) Capital ! Will you take charge of the tea table, Lady Harburgh ?

Lady Harburgh. With pleasure !

Bingham. (*goes to back of sofa* R.) Ring the bell, Tins, will you ?

(Barker *goes* L. C., *rings bell by desk, places cane and gloves on desk, then takes cup of tea and jug of milk to* Muriel.)

Lady Harburgh. (*pours out tea*) Where's Colonel Anstruther ?

Mannering. He's with the Adjutant. He'll be here in a moment. (*goes down* L. *to paper tables, and looks at newspapers*)

Bingham. (*back of sofa, in a whisper to* Muriel) He's to be our best man, you know.

Lady Harburgh. Colonel Anstruther is a very able officer, I believe. That, of course, is why they gave him command of the regiment.

Bingham. Yes, rather an unusual reason in the British Army.

Lady Harburgh. If it's not a rude question, Major Bingham, why didn't you get it?

(Barker *and* Hildebrand *take tea to* Norah, *who takes* Barker's. Barker *sits by* Norah.)

Bingham. Well, I was rather busy at the time.

(*Enter* Medenham *with jug of hot water on salver.*)

Then I'm not in a very good odour with the powers that be. I've criticized their methods freely, and got into——

Medenham. (r. *of* Bingham) Hot water, sir?

Bingham. Eh? Oh, ah, yes.

(Hartopp *enters* r. *with cake stand.* Medenham *goes to him, takes cake stand and gives him salver*; Medenham *places stand above.*)

Intelligent waiter, that.

(*Exit* Medenham, r.)

Lady Harburgh. I suppose all important commands and staff appointments nowadays are made by selection.

Bingham. Yes, to a certain extent. That is to say, War Office officials as a rule select themselves. (*returns sugar to table*)

Lady Harburgh. Whether competent or not.

Bingham. (*takes plate of cakes*) Competence isn't included in the requirements.

(Hildebrand *stands behind tea-table.*)

LADY HARBURGH. Really? Then let us hope, Major Bingham, that you have a brilliant career before you.

(HILDEBRAND *laughs.*)

BINGHAM. How good of you! Thanks awfully. (*takes cake to* MURIEL) Kind woman, isn't she?

LADY HARBURGH. You know there's a wonderful charm in picnicking in rooms that are used by men, and men only.

BINGHAM. (*comes* C.) Really? (*places plate on stand*)

LADY HARBURGH. Yes. Such a comfortable absence of things that are easily knocked over.

BINGHAM. Yes. Gives you more room for bowling over individuals.

LADY HARBURGH. Perhaps!

BINGHAM. (*goes to* MURIEL) Lady Harburgh is inclined to be a little distant, don't you think?

MURIEL. I suppose she is.

(LADY HARBURGH *and* MANNERING *converse audibly* L. C. BARKER *and* NORAH *talk up* R.)

BINGHAM. (*sits*) So I've come here to keep it up—geographically. You've no idea how absurdly happy I am. I am light-hearted and light-headed as a happy madman that has no lucid moments whatever. I suppose you don't—quite—feel the same sort of thing?

MURIEL. No, not quite. You remember what I told you. I was perfectly frank with you.

BINGHAM. Yes, oh, yes. I'm not complaining. I was only wondering.

MURIEL. Perhaps some day you may change, and——

BINGHAM. Yes, yes—and then you'll feel the warmth of the sunshine as I do. By the way, (*looks over to* L., *then aside to her*) there's the ring to be thought of.

(BARKER *rises, places cups on table behind seat up* R., *then stands at window* C. *with* NORAH.)

MURIEL. The ring? Oh, I see—the engagement ring.

BINGHAM. Yes, doesn't it sound exciting? One can almost hear the wedding bells and feel the scent of the orange blossoms. What sort of ring would you like?

(LADY HARBURGH *laughs, and* MANNERING *rises, goes to table* L., *gets photo album, brings it to above* LADY HARBURGH *up* L.)

MURIEL. I'll leave it to you. Don't let us talk about it now. I feel as if something were going to happen.

BINGHAM. Happen? What?

MURIEL. I don't know.

BINGHAM. Then you'd better have some more tea.

(ORDERLY *crosses at back from* R. *to* L.)

MURIEL. No, thanks.

BINGHAM. I wonder what it is.

Muriel. Oh, imagination probably. It's only natural I should feel excited.

Bingham. Yes, yes, of course.

Barker. Here comes the Colonel.

(Barker *and* Norah *go to window* R. Mannering *places album on table, goes up* C. *to window* C.)

Lady Harburgh. I'm so glad he's coming.

Muriel. The Colonel ?

Bingham. Yes, our best man, you know.

Muriel. What is the name ? Quick—tell me.

Bingham. Anstruther.

Muriel. Colonel Anstruther ?

Bingham. Yes.

Mannering. (*looking off* L. C.) An orderly's stopped him.

Lady Harburgh. I suppose he's dreadfully busy over the move.

Bingham. Yes, he has lots to do.

Muriel. (*to* Bingham) Isn't he coming ?

Bingham. Yes, if you like you can see him from the window.

(Norah *and* Barker *chatting at window, rather loudly then quietly.*)

Muriel. No, I don't want to.

Bingham. Muriel, what is it ?

Muriel. Nothing, I'd rather not. What is he like ?

Bingham. Anstruther ? Oh, here he is.

(*Enter* R. *through window*, Colonel Anstruther.)

Anstruther. How d'you do? I'm so sorry not to have been here before, but a thousand little things kept me.

Lady Harburgh. Oh, we quite understand how busy you must be. We've had a most excellent tea.

Anstruther. That's right.

Bingham. By the way, Colonel, you haven't met Miss Mannering. (*turning to* Muriel) May I introduce Colonel Anstruther?

Muriel. I almost seem to know you, Colonel Anstruther.

Anstruther. Oddly enough I had the same feeling. Possibly because of your likeness to your brother.

Muriel. I seem to know your face.

Anstruther. Then we're almost old friends.

Muriel. Yes, almost old friends.

(Mannering *calls* Bingham *to see photo.*)

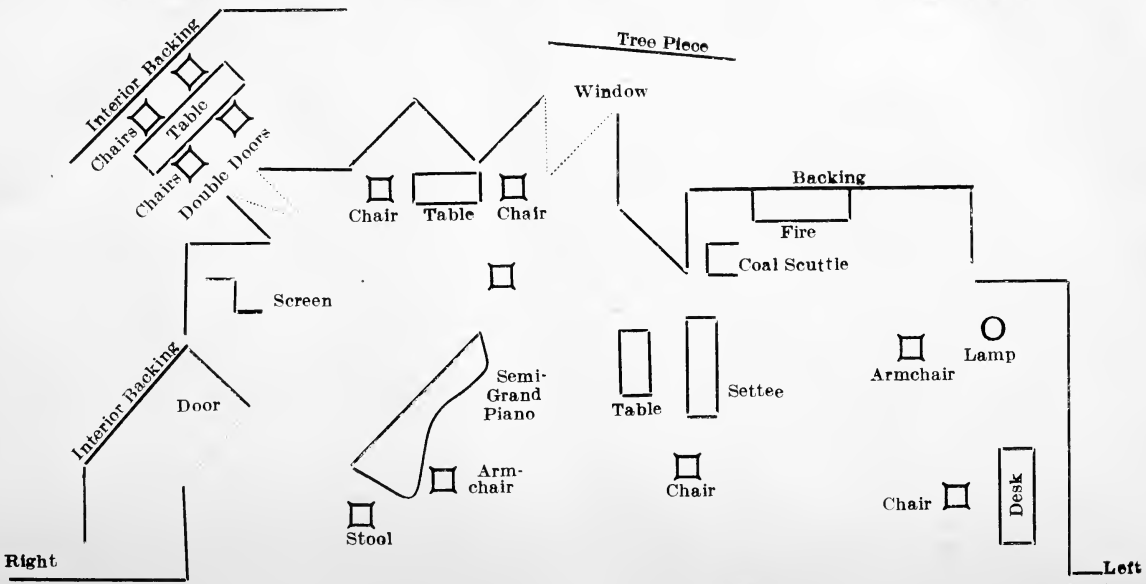
Curtain.

ACT II

Brush for Medenham at fireplace.
Tray, coffee, cuaçoa and glasses, etc., for Hartopp.
Pictures on walls.
Bugler and bugle picquet calls, etc.
Anstruther has cheque book.
Writing materials including blotting pad on desk on left.
Telegram in envelope for Medenham to hand to Anstruther.
Photo frame on piano.
Medenham with tray, whisky and soda, cigars, cigarettes, etc.

Songs Ready.

"Boys old Brigade."
"When your hair grows whiter."
Cello solo—"Star of Eve."
"Love's old sweet song" (*Bingham*).
"Say au revoir."
"Wrap me up in my stable jacket."


ACT II.
Back Cloth. Same as Act I.
Interior Backing
Chairs
Table
Chairs
Double Doors
Tree Piece
Window
Chair
Table
Chair
Backing
Fire
Coal Scuttle
Screen
Interior Backing
Door
Semi-Grand Piano
Arm-chair
Stool
Table
Settee
Chair
Armchair
Lamp
Chair
Desk
Right
Left

ACT II.

SCENE.—COLONEL ANSTRUTHER'S *quarters.*

(*As the curtain rises,* MEDENHAM *is discovered up at fire, brushing hearth. Enter* HARTOPP *with tray of coffee, etc., goes to table in window* R.)

MEDENHAM. (*turns*) They ain't ready for coffee yet. They're 'avin' dessert and the Colonel's 'ealth.

HARTOPP. Wot? Speechifying? (*puts down tray*)

MEDENHAM. Yes, Binks is at it 'ard.

HARTOPP. 'E's a great boy, is Binks.

MEDENHAM. What d'ye say to joining in the toast? (*hangs up brush*)

HARTOPP. Right you are! You keep sentry go on the door and I'll do the honours.

MEDENHAM. Right! (*crosses to doors up* R. *and listens*)

HARTOPP. Curaçoa? (*pours out liqueur*)

MEDENHAM. That's the touch. Rum shift the Colonel giving a farewell dinner in his quarters just before the regiment moves.

HARTOPP. 'Aven't ye spotted the Colonel's little game?

Medenham. (*listening*) Not I. I've been packin' in the mess for all my bloomin' life's worth.

Hartopp. 'E's in love.

Medenham. (*turns*) Go on!

Hartopp. It's straight. (*hands glass*) 'Ere, freeze on to that.

Medenham. Well, Colonel's health.

Hartopp. And Bink's?

(*Both about to drink.*)

Steady on. (*places both glasses on tray*) 'Ere comes a squad of 'em.

(*Both attention. Doors open.* Colonel *with* Barker *and* Bingham *are seen at doors with* ladies, *all chatting.* Lady Harburgh *goes to seat* l. c. *by fireplace, sits.* Norah *goes up* c. Muriel *comes down* c. *Folding doors are closed.*)

Lady Harburgh. Thank you, Colonel. (*crosses to* l. c.) A very delightful little dinner party. Bachelors make excellent hosts.

(Hartopp *fills coffee cups.*)

Norah. (*up* c.) Yes, they do clumsy things so genially. As a rule a dinner bores me horribly. Play something, Muriel. (*comes down to piano*)

(Muriel *sits at piano.*)

Lady Harburgh. It is not for any young girl to feel bored. As you go through life you'll find the easily bored are themselves the greatest bores.

Hartopp. Coffee, my lady.

(MURIEL *plays piano.*)

LADY HARBURGH. Thank you. (*to* MEDENHAM) Isn't Colonel Anstruther going to pack all these things of his? (*indicates articles in room*)

MEDENHAM. Well, you see, my lady, strange as it may seem, we don't take furniture and lamps and pictures on active service.

LADY HARBURGH. I don't suppose you do.

MEDENHAM. They might 'amper us in action. No, my lady, after we've gone, a firm in the town packs and stores them.

LADY HARBURGH. I see. Well, I'm sure we all wish you every success in the forthcoming campaign.

MEDENHAM. Thank you, my lady. We 'ope in a quiet way to assert the supremacy of British arms.

LADY HARBURGH. I understand there is a camp fire, an open air concert, or some such function to-night?

MEDENHAM. Yes, my lady, just outside under the trees; you'll find chairs placed for the Officers' party.

(MURIEL *stops playing and goes up* C. *to window.*)

LADY HARBURGH. Thank you.

(*Exeunt* HARTOPP *and* MEDENHAM.)

MURIEL. (*up* C.) What a perfect evening. And all these lighted barrack rooms filled with men who soon will be sleeping on the open veldt. (*comes down a little* C.)

Lady Harburgh. Exactly. All of which means that you've very little time to lose.

Muriel. (*up* c.) I—I don't understand.

Lady Harburgh. My dear Muriel, to close one's eyes is somewhat discreet, to be blind—never.

(Muriel *comes in front to* l. *of fire.*)

I mean that, were I a young woman and knew that two men were devoted to me, I should arrange a crisis before their embarkation.

Muriel. What? To scheme for my own selfish ends?

Lady Harburgh. Partly, dear, for mine.

Muriel. (*bitterly*) Oh, of course, I forgot, quite forgot that I exist on—on your charity.

Lady Harburgh. Muriel!

Muriel. (*a step to her*) Forgive me! I didn't mean it. You've been very good to me, and I haven't been worth it.

Lady Harburgh. Remember, you won't always be young. There comes the day when the roses and the lilies fade, when the soft cadences of a young voice change to the shrill arpeggios of middle age.

Muriel. Yes, I know. (*sits* l. *of fire*)

Lady Harburgh. You must have noticed Colonel Anstruther's very marked admiration. He scarcely touched a morsel at dinner.

Muriel. I'm very sorry that I should be responsible for any loss of appetite.

Lady Harburgh. It's an infallible indication of

a leaning towards matrimony. When poor Harburgh and I were first engaged, he practically lived on sandwiches.

Norah. (*laughs*) It's quite different with Hildebrand. The more he's in love the more he eats and drinks. (*laughs*) To-night he drank everybody's health separately.

Lady Harburgh. Hildebrand never exceeds.

Norah. Hum! hum! We shall see presently.

Lady Harburgh. We will see at once. (*rises, opens door and calls*) Hildebrand!

Hildebrand. (*off*) Mother!

Lady Harburgh. I cannot believe that a son of mine could possibly consume more than is adequate to meet the requirements of a warm summer evening.

(Hildebrand *appears. In the following scene he only indicates very slight excess.*)

Hildebrand. You want me, mother?

Lady Harburgh. What have you been doing, Hildebrand?

Hildebrand. I am—about—to make—speech.

Lady Harburgh. I can hardly believe it, but you certainly import an alcoholic atmosphere.

Hildebrand. I do not deny it. Strong waters are the glory of a man and the shame—of a woman. I forbid you to refer to them.

Lady Harburgh. My only regret is that the carriage is not here. If it were, I should send you home at once.

Hildebrand. Wild horses would not drag me. I have made up my mind.

Norah. To what, Billy?

Hildebrand. I am going in for something—once an' for all.

Norah. That's quite right. What is it?

Hildebrand. I don't know. Whatever you like.

Lady Harburgh. Sit down.

Hildebrand. (*collapses into chair* L. *of piano*) Pleasure. And having taken the chair—I am about to make—speech.

Lady Harburgh. It is only too obvious that idleness is the mother of vice.

Hildebrand. Yes, and what an enormous family she has.

Lady Harburgh. Your deplorable condition is enough to rouse the Maclachlans of the Hebrides in their mountain graves.

Hildebrand. The Maclachlans of the Hebrides sleeping peacefully under the "mountain dew." What a beautiful idea.

Lady Harburgh. You will be good enough at least to show a perfunctory reverence for your mother's ancestors.

Hildebrand. I have been—credibly informed that the Maclachlans of the Hebrides were—never sober.

Lady Harburgh. Oh! (*turns to* Muriel)

Norah. Oh! Hildebrand! (*comes down to back of* Hildebrand)

Hildebrand. Fact! Mother has often told me so herself.

Lady Harburgh. (*comes* c.) It may be that the storm and stress of the middle ages——

Hildebrand. (*gravely*) That was no excuse. (*smiles*) Don't whitewash them, mother. The world is as parched now as in mediaeval days, occasionally more so. (*gravely*) And it is my duty to fight—'gainst her-heredit-t-tary tendencies.

Lady Harburgh. Do not attempt to pronounce words of so many syllables.

(*Song heard off* r. "*The Boys of the Old Brigade.*")

Hildebrand. I doubt if you could say her-hereditary tendencies three times quickly.

Lady Harburgh. I have no intention of trying. (*goes up* c.)

Hildebrand. Ha! Ha! No enterprise. (*sits at piano*)

Lady Harburgh. Listen! The camp fire has begun. Come, Muriel, let us breathe the fresh night air, the atmosphere is vitiated. And by a son—of my own.

(Hildebrand *plays on piano with one finger*, "*We won't go home till morning.*")

(*Exeunt* Lady Harburgh *and* Muriel.)

Norah. Hildebrand!

Hildebrand. Take care! (*repeats* "*We won't go home till morning*")

Norah. What do you mean?

Hildebrand. I'm vitiated. (*repeats "We won't go home till morning"*)

Norah. (*closes piano*) Listen! It was I who told Aunt Agatha that you had had such quantities of wine.

Hildebrand. (*opens piano*) Did you? I forgive you—fully and freely. (*concludes "and then we won't go home"*)

(Hildebrand *turns to* Norah, *who has gone to* L. C. *and then returns to* R. C.)

I had a special opportunity for enjoyment at dinner to-night. A large azalea on the table formed a zereba against mother's ancestral eye. I feel absolutely altruistic.

Norah. Now, understand me. I will never marry you until you have got an appointment of some sort. And you must give me your word of honour never to touch wine again until you do.

Hildebrand. Does wine include spirits?

Norah. Of course it does.

Hildebrand. And beer?

Norah. It does.

Hildebrand. Well—I promise—but—I'll get 'pointment to-morrow.

(*Bugle heard off, "Piquet Call."*)

(*Enter* Barker *and* Mannering.)

Mannering. Why on earth is the piquet call

going now? You lucky people, with nothing to do but eat, drink and be merry.

(*Exit* Norah.)

Hallo, Carstairs.

(*Enter* Medenham.)

Hildebrand. Excuse me, I'm in great trouble.

(*Exit.*)

(*Bugle heard off, "Piquet Call"*)

Medenham. Your sword and cap, sir. Excuse me, Sir Walter, I think you'd better go out by the lawn.

Mannering. Really, why?

Medenham. There's a man outside with a warrant of arrest for debt, sir, asking for you. I said you wasn't in barracks. "Well," says he, "he ought to be, as I happen to know he's Orderly Officer." I'd made a slight mistake, sir, and he won't go away.

Mannering. Thank you, Medenham—I'm glad you told me.

(*Bugle call repeat "Piquet Call" farther away.*)

(*Exit* Mannering *and* Medenham.)

(*Enter* Colonel Anstruther, *who goes to* l. c., *and* Bingham, *who goes into window* c.)

Bingham. (*as they enter*) But you know——

Anstruther. No, I can't agree with you—Hallo! an empty room! Where's everybody? (*over* l.)

Bingham. Gone to the sing-song probably. By

Jove, what a divine night. Life is smiling to-night, Miles, absolutely beaming. The very stars are twinkling in sheer delight. Look at them.

Anstruther. Have a cigar? (*sits armchair* L.)

Bingham. Yes, give me anything, everything. Wine, stars, tobacco, moonlight, love. I'm a king to-night—let everything pay me tribute. (*sits on settee*)

Anstruther. If high spirits are an indication, Kit, your moral barometer is rising.

Bingham. Rising, Miles? Why, it's risen. The mercury has pressed to the tip-top of the tube, and the weather's perfectly astonishing.

Anstruther. Mercury no doubt associated with Venus.

Bingham. Ah, there you are! I can't tell you; I've given a promise. But, look here—no, no,—honour bright, I can't tell you.

Anstruther. Perhaps I can find out.

Bingham. No, I think not. I've been discreet and loyal. Not a soul has an idea of what has happened.

Anstruther. So a lover always thinks.

Bingham. Does he? Yes, I suppose in the eyes of the world the lover is a fool. But, Miles, it's a glorious folly, beyond the reach of the poor cynics who laugh at us with the mirthless envy they call philosophy. If they felt as I feel, they'd know. Miles, Miles, if you only knew.

Anstruther. I've an odd idea that I do. But

I never dreamed that you suffered so acutely from the artistic temperament.

Bingham. Do I?

Anstruther. Obviously.

Bingham. I didn't know. I always associate the artistic temperament with persons who eat enormously. When they're really dyspeptic you get originality.

(*Both laugh.*)

You know, a chap like old——

Anstruther. Kit, I want you to be serious.

Bingham. Right! That's one of the lover's deep delights—to be mad one moment and sane the next. What is it?

Anstruther. I've found out that young Mannering is in very low financial water.

Bingham. Yes, I know he is, poor chap.

Anstruther. There's a chance of his not getting out with us.

Bingham. As bad as that?

Anstruther. (*rises and goes down* L.) Yes. Now—I hate to say it—but I'm what you call——

Bingham. (*rises*) A rich man?

Anstruther. Yes, Kit, that's what I meant.

Bingham. Miles—I suppose I ought to say "Colonel," but I can't—you are a good sort.

Anstruther. There you go, jumping at conclusions.

Bingham. Yes; because I've guessed.

Anstruther. Well? What d'you say?

Bingham. He wouldn't take it. Nothing short of three thousand would clear him. He'd never take it.

Anstruther. I suppose he wouldn't. I haven't known him a month yet, but there's another way.

Bingham. What other way?

Anstruther. He'd take it from you. (*goes to desk*)

Bingham. Possibly! The difficulty there is that he'd never get it.

Anstruther. No! But I could hand the money over to you. See—here's my cheque book. You pay that into your account and hand Mannering a cheque of your own for the amount.

Bingham. But, good Heavens! You don't suppose that he'd believe I had that amount to distribute like—like a tract.

Anstruther. Why not?

Bingham. (*sits at end of piano*) Everybody knows I was never out of debt in my life. You ask my tailor, he'll tell you. I never pay for clothes till long after they've been given to the poor.

Anstruther. Well then, you've suddenly come into a fortune. That's quite possible.

Bingham. It isn't really. Not if you knew my people. They're all distinguished but unmarketable folk who exist on pensions or annuities.

Anstruther. That doesn't matter. (*tears cheque out and blots it*) Come, Kit, in the vocabulary of a

(*rises*) Cavalry Major, there's no such word as "fail." (*comes up to fire, dries cheque at fire*)

Bingham. Isn't there? Not in yours, perhaps, but there is in mine. I say, bar chaff—do you really think I could do it?

Anstruther. Of course you could. So take the cheque, like a good soul. I can't stand by and see a promising young boy go to the dogs.

Bingham. (*takes cheque*) You're one in a thousand, Miles, and I'll do it. (*sits* L. *of fire*) I say, you know, they'll howl with laughter when I hint that I've acquired a fortune and eleemosynary tendencies.

(*Song heard in distance, "When your hair grows whiter."*)

Anstruther. You know, Kit, what I'm doing is not so disinterested as it seems.

Bingham. No!

Anstruther. For I'm—I'm in love at last.

Bingham. Oh—what you? Oh, no, you don't say so, really?

Anstruther. Yes! I see life just as you do.

Bingham. That's awfully funny.

Anstruther. Yes! Isn't it? (*slaps* Bingham *on shoulder*) Kit, we're middle-aged fools, you and I, but we don't look for wisdom as long as the midsummer folly lasts.

Bingham. And—if it's a fair question—who is she?

Anstruther. Kit, Mannering's sister—Muriel.

(*Singing rises and falls.*)

Bingham. What ! ! !

Anstruther. You never dreamt of that, did you ?

Bingham. No—it never—occurred to me.

Anstruther. And you've nothing to say ?

Bingham. (*rises*) To say ? Why—yes—of course I have—lots. (*goes to* R. C.) You see, Colonel, these things always come as a surprise.

Anstruther. I haven't spoken yet, you know.

Bingham. Of course you're prepared for—possible refusal ?

Anstruther. No, I don't think I am.

Bingham. No ?

Anstruther. No ! One can read the answer in the eyes long before the question is put. You must have found that.

Bingham. No, I don't know that I have. (*goes to down* R.) At least, not always the correct answer.

(*Enter* Norah, L. C.)

Norah. (*down* C.) Please, Major Bingham, we all want you. It's such a lovely night, and the men are singing choruses beautifully.

Bingham. (*up to piano*) What ? (*hand on piano*) Miss Mannering sent you ?

Norah. No, but she's there. Come along. (*up to back of seat* L. C.) You don't mind my taking him away, do you, Colonel Anstruther ? He's promised to sing.

Anstruther. Have you, Kit ?

BINGHAM. I believe I have.

NORAH. Does he sing well?

ANSTRUTHER. He—er—sings. (*turns to fire again*)

(*Exit* NORAH.)

Kit—dear old happy-go-lucky Kit—he can't have fallen a captive to that little madcap. No, no, he's too old a soldier.

(*Enter* MEDENHAM, R.)

MEDENHAM. Telegram, sir.

ANSTRUTHER. Official? (*advances to* C.)

MEDENHAM. Yes, sir, to Commanding Officer.

ANSTRUTHER. It's late for a telegram. (*goes to* L., *reads telegram under lamp above desk*) From "Brigade Major. The regiment under your command will embark at Southampton—

(*Enter* MURIEL.)

on Friday, the 8th inst., for service in South Africa. You will receive fully detailed instructions by 9 a.m. to-morrow."

MEDENHAM. (*eagerly*) Orders for the front, sir? (*draws himself to attention*)

ANSTRUTHER. Eh! Oh! (*surprised*) Yes, Medenham, we're off in three days. Take this to the Adjutant at once. I'll see him myself presently.

MEDENHAM. Yes, sir.

(*Exit down* R.)

ANSTRUTHER. Three days' time. (*places cigar*

on mantelshelf, turns to C.) Miss Mannering, I didn't see you come in.

Muriel. I'm so sorry, Colonel Anstruther. I accidentally overheard.

Anstruther. There's no reason why you shouldn't. I'd have told you myself in any case.

Muriel. And you go in three days' time?

Anstruther. Yes; you'll miss us a little, I hope.

Muriel. More than a little.

(*Singing ceases—no applause.*)

Anstruther. Of course! I'd forgotten, there's Walter. That must mean a great break. Your only brother.

Muriel. Poor Walter! One can only try and be glad that he is going to realize an ambition and see active service. You've seen a great deal already, haven't you?

Anstruther. Oh, yes! I've had my share of luck.

Muriel. And your Distinguished Service Medal. How splendid that was. That wasn't a case of luck.

Anstruther. I think it was. I only did what a hundred others were ready to do. Far finer things have been done quite quietly by men who were never even mentioned in despatches. Still—there's only one thing on earth I'd exchange the little enamel cross for.

Muriel. No, surely—there's nothing.

Anstruther. Yes, and it's something that you could give.

Muriel. That I could give ?

Anstruther. Yes, only you.

Muriel. Colonel Anstruther. (*a step down*)

Anstruther. It isn't hard to guess, is it ? Shall I tell you ?

Muriel. No, no ! I mustn't hear—I'm afraid to.

Anstruther. There's nothing to be afraid of—nothing you need——

Muriel. Yes, yes, there is. You—you don't know.

Anstruther. I know that I love you.

(Muriel *moves down.*)

Yes—you must let me say it. You can't deny me that. Muriel, you must have seen it.

Muriel. You don't know how you're hurting me.

Anstruther. Muriel !

Muriel. No, no, I can't—indeed I can't listen.

Anstruther. I only want to tell you the truth. I'm not capable of hurting you. For days and nights I've been waiting for this hour to come. And now—now—I'm alone with you, we sail in a day or two, and I can't keep back the truth.

(Muriel *moves down.*)

You must hear it. Love had been to me the merest fairy tale till with an invisible wand you touched it into reality.

(*Start 'cello solo.*)

And then—of a sudden—my eyes were opened, I was awake, and life had a new meaning.

(*'Cello solo heard in distance playing "Star of Eve."*)

Muriel. Yes—a new meaning.

Anstruther. Muriel, I haven't been blind. I know that you love me.

Muriel. No, no, I can't. I haven't the right to——

Anstruther. Not the right to? Why—that day we met I swear I read it in your eyes that we were each the gift of life to the other. Muriel—why—you're trembling. (*takes her hand*)

Muriel. Yes, I'm trembling with happiness and pain.

Anstruther. Pain?

Muriel. Yes; that a happy dreamland has come into view that can only fade away.

Anstruther. But why—why fade away?

Muriel. (*removes her hand*) I am not free.

Anstruther. Not free? (*moves to* C.) I didn't know. I never dreamt of that. (*hand on chair* C. You—you must forgive me for speaking.

Muriel. You see how quickly the day dream dies. But there is nothing to forgive, only something never to be forgotten.

Anstruther. And I may not ask you——

Muriel. No; we'll let it end as it is. It's just been a day dream. Something one sees for a moment in the sky at sunset, or in the embers of a fire in winter, something one feels of a sudden and wonders at, but can't keep hold of.

Anstruther. And you've no vague little hope

to hold out? Nothing I can take to sea as a talisman? No whispered "perhaps"?

MURIEL. No! Nothing!

(*A pause. Then* COLONEL *turns slowly up and goes to door* R. *As he is about to close them* MANNERING *appears through window* C. *He catches the glimpse of the* COLONEL'S *back.* MURIEL *crosses slowly and sadly up* L. *by fire.* MANNERING *removes his sword and cap, places them on table* R. *of window, gazing from the closed doors to* MURIEL *intently.*)

MANNERING. Muriel—why—what's the matter? (*comes to* C.)

MURIEL. (*up* L.) It's nothing, Walter. Only that—Colonel Anstruther told me——

MANNERING. Yes—what?

MURIEL. That you sail in three days.

MANNERING. The orders have come?

MURIEL. (*sits on chair* C.) Yes, he's got a telegram. And now that it's so near I'm nervous and unhappy. We've never been really separated before, and somehow—having no one else but you—I feel alone and almost afraid.

MANNERING. (*comes to her*). Muriel, I haven't been half the brother to you that I ought. (*takes her hands*)

MURIEL. Yes, you have. Don't say that. You've always been good and kind, Walter. You remember the night when we both promised mother to be everything to each other, even if a sacrifice were necessary?

Mannering. Yes, I remember.

Muriel. That was the last thing she said to me.

Mannering. I know.

Muriel. And when you're far away, and perhaps suffering, I want you always to remember that I am praying for you, not now and then, but always.

Mannering. (*comes to down* c.) Muriel—perhaps —I may not go.

('*Cello stops.*)

Muriel. Not go?

Mannering. No! There's a writ for debt out against me and the Colonel would never let me go if he came to know of it.

Muriel. Walter! (*leans on chair* c.)

Mannering. It's true. I've tried to raise the money and failed, hopelessly.

Muriel. (*comes to* r. c.) But, Walter—it's terrible. It means disgrace, doesn't it? How did it happen?

Mannering. Don't ask me, dear. (*crosses to* l.) It wouldn't help us. (*up to fire*) I've been a spendthrift blackguard and it's over. (*sits on seat up* l.c.)

Muriel. What's to be done?

Mannering. Nothing. I thought for a moment when I saw you with the Colonel, that—there was just a chance——

Muriel. A chance? Of what?

Mannering. No, I can't tell you. I've been vile enough as it is.

Muriel. (*up to him*). But you *must* tell me,

Walter. Don't you see that we've nobody but each other to help us now. What is it? What is it? Quick! (*leans over him*, L.)

Mannering. Fenwick, the lawyer, said he *might* raise the money if you were going to marry a rich man—like the Colonel. He really meant that he would lend it himself and take the risk.

Muriel. I—to marry Colonel Anstruther?

Mannering. Yes.

Muriel. You can't realize what you're saying, Walter. The bare idea of scheming and trafficking in marriage is revolting—horrible.

Mannering. Of course—it's a wild scheme and impossible. I'd never have spoken of it, but in the last few days I got an idea that he really cared for you.

Muriel. (*goes down* R. C.) Hush! You mustn't say that. I've—I've promised to be Kit's wife.

Mannering. What?

Muriel. Yes. I meant to tell you before this, but—somehow I couldn't.

Mannering. And you really love him—love Kit?

Muriel. I—yes——

Mannering. Muriel——!

Muriel. Yes, Walter, really.

Mannering. I'd no idea of that. I'd never have uttered a word——

Muriel. I know you wouldn't. But I must think—— (*crosses to* R.) I must have time. Is it much?

Mannering. The money? (*down* L.)

Muriel. Yes.

Mannering. Three thousand.

Muriel. Three thousand pounds. Walter, Walter, how *could* you do it?

Mannering. I don't know. Because I've been a selfish brute and not fit to be a brother of yours. (*turns away to* L.)

Muriel. Something must be done. There's no time to be lost. *I* must do something.

Mannering. (*turns to her*) Muriel—dearest—you're to do nothing. You couldn't raise the money, and I won't have you try. I'm not worth it.

Muriel. (*up* R. C.) It isn't that. It's a question of what is right—what is best to be done. (*down* R.)

(*Enter* Major Bingham, L. *up* C.)

Bingham. (*up* C.) Halloa! Halloa! the deserters! A perfect night—one of a hundred in this alluvial country, and yet you waste it indoors. To say nothing of the camp fire.

Muriel. (R.) Yes, Walter and I——

Mannering. (L.) I've seen so little of Muriel lately, and I——

Muriel. Walter, I want to speak to Major Bingham a moment.

Bingham. (*up* C.) Yes, of course you do. So retire, Walter, as if the enemy were in sight. (*goes to fire*)

(Mannering *crosses* C. *to up* R. C., *gets sword and cap, then turns and gazes at* Muriel.)

Brothers are all very well in broad daylight, but when the lamps are lit and the moon is up—you want something more. Well—what are you staring at ? (*turns and looks into fire*)

Mannering. Oh, nothing ! (*to* Muriel) Muriel, remember what I told you ; you're to do nothing.

(*Exit* L. C.)

Bingham. There ! Our first moment alone to-night. (*comes* C.) Muriel ! I'm sorry—I keep forgetting that you don't feel yet just as I do ; I'm so tactless.

(Muriel *goes down to* R., *then returns and sits* L. *of piano.* Bingham *gets chair from* C. *and places it* L. *of her.*)

By the way, we've a tremendous ceremony to go through. I've—I've got the ring.

Muriel. The ring ?

Bingham. (*sits* L. *of her*) Yes, the engagement ring. (*takes ring from vest pocket*) It came by post to-night. Here it is. There—isn't it a beauty. A ruby with a diamond on either side. The ruby stands for my heart, and it's held fast by one pure diamond for the beauty of your soul, and by the other for the beauty of yourself. It's my own idea. There ! put it on. Doesn't it sparkle wonderfully ?

Muriel. Does it ? (*not looking*)

Bingham. Yes. Look ! The stones seem to flash every colour.

Muriel. (*looks*) Yes ; I see.

Bingham. So there it is, with all the love I have to give you, and you'll never know, dearest, how much that is.

Muriel. Kit—I—I can't.

Bingham. Muriel! Why, what a wretched lover I am. Of course—I must put it on. I forgot that. Let's see, which is the finger? Does it matter?

Muriel. Kit—I can't—I can't wear it.

Bingham. Muriel!

Muriel. I don't know what to say. I don't even feel that I can think. Kit, I want to ask you—for my——

Bingham. My darling! for what?

Muriel. My freedom.

Bingham. I—I don't think I—quite understand—I'm stupid and dense, Muriel. I'm quite sure it's all right—that it means—only something that I ought to see and don't.

Muriel. Kit, I had no right to say I would be your wife. I—I didn't feel—things have happened. I've realized—that I was wrong to—— (*cries*)

Bingham. Yes! Ah, don't, don't, dear. I know now—I see all at once—how it's hurting you to say it—but I'm sure—you're right.

Muriel. Kit!

Bingham. I know, dear. I know what it means. It isn't right—it isn't possible—that you should give your life to me. I was mad to dream of it.

Muriel. It was all my fault. And now—it comes to you.

Bingham. No, no! It was I who was cruel. But—Muriel—it was a blindness, somehow, as if the sun had got into my eyes, and I could only see and feel for myself. And all you want to tell me—there, let me take your hand—you look white and scared—is that—everything's over.

Muriel. (*withdraws her hand*) Yes.

Bingham. Well, then, it's over.

(*Shouting heard in distance for a few seconds—stops at bell.* Muriel *rises, places her hand on* Bingham's *shoulder.*)

It was almost bound to happen. I saw a magpie to-day.

Muriel. (*mechanically*) A magpie?

Bingham. Yes. Don't bother about it, it's nothing. Only they say it means bad luck.

(*Shouting repeated, "Where's the Major?" etc. A man heard running until* Barker *speaks off.*)

Barker. (*off* L.) Major! Major Bingham!

(*Enter* Barker.)

I say, Major, all the men are shouting on you for a song.

Bingham. Are they?

Barker. Yes, yelling. So come along.

(*Shouting stops.*)

Bingham. I couldn't, Barker. I couldn't possibly. I'm not in tune to-night.

Barker. Oh, that's all right. As a matter of

fact, vocally you very seldom are. You must sing, mustn't he, Miss Mannering?

Muriel. No, no, don't ask him to. He doesn't want to.

Bingham. There you are. I don't want to.

Barker. (*goes to down* L.) But he must, you know. The men will mutiny if he doesn't. (*comes* C.) He sings beautifully. All sorts of cheery songs —"The Heart bowed down," "When other lips," and so on. The Tommies simply worship him. Besides, Major, you promised. (*goes up* L. C.)

Bingham. Did I?

Barker. Of course you did, so come along. (*up to* L. *of window*)

Bingham. Then perhaps I'd better.

Muriel. (*comes to him—aside*) It will make things seem as if—as if nothing had happened.

Bingham. Would it? Yes, perhaps it would. All right, Barker, I'll sing. (*goes to* R. *of window*)

Bingham. (*to* Muriel) I'd rather you didn't listen.

Muriel. No, I'll stay here.

Bingham. Thank you. I don't sing really well, you know. I—I get out of tune. Come along then, Barker. (*holds* Barker *by the arms*) But I will not sing "The Heart bowed down."

Barker. (R. C.) All right. Anything you like.

Bingham. (L. C.) I'll sing something cheerful, something that goes with a swing. I—no, no, Barker, I can't—I really can't. (*goes to table by seat* L. C.,

picks up cigar cutter and examines it to conceal his emotion) You don't know what you're asking.

Barker. (*putting cap on*) Oh, rot! Come along!

Bingham. Well, if I must—I must. But I insist on singing something rousing—something jolly.

Barker. Yes, of course, anything you——

(*Exeunt* Bingham *and* Barker *off* L. C.)

Muriel. (*pause, she comes up to* C.) Poor Kit! (*goes to fireplace*) Poor Kit!

(*Shouting very loud, "Here's the Major," etc.*)

(*Enter* Colonel Anstruther *up* R.)

Anstruther. Still here, Miss Mannering.

Muriel. Yes; I've been thinking.

Anstruther. Wouldn't you rather be with the others?

Muriel. No, I'd rather wait here.

(*Shouting stops.*)

Anstruther. I'm afraid it's my fault—that your evening——

Muriel. No, no—don't say that—it isn't your fault——

(*Song starts, "Love's Old Sweet Song."*)

Anstruther. I wish you'd—I don't know how to say it. I was never good at finding the right words, but you're in trouble. Won't you at least make a friend of me?

Muriel. Don't—don't be kind to me. I can't bear it.

Anstruther. I only want to help you. Somehow I feel that the trouble lies in the words you said to me: "I am not free."

Muriel. I—I thought it was true.

Anstruther. Thought! Why, then, surely that means——

Muriel. Ah, don't. I—I never meant to say it.

Anstruther. No, but a lover's ears are keen—Muriel, everything is whispering to me that we are being drawn to each other.

(Muriel *makes a movement of anguish.*)

I don't ask you to tell me anything, but somehow I know. When first I spoke to you to-night, you thought—you believed—you weren't free.

Muriel. Yes.

Anstruther. And now——

Muriel. Now— (*turns slowly to him*) if——

Anstruther. If! (*taking her in his arms*) Muriel, my darling. (*kisses her hair*) And it honestly means happiness to you as well as to me?

Muriel. Yes, a great happiness, the happiness I've prayed for, the happiness I've pictured with closed eyes for fear the sight of the outer world would drive it away.

Anstruther. My—my wife. (*kisses her, his arm round her waist.*)

(*They go up. Singing swells.*)

Muriel. (*stops in window*) Listen. The men are singing "Love's Old Sweet Song."

Anstruther. Perhaps they've guessed our secret. (*kisses her hands*)

(*They move up again.*)

Muriel. Here comes Walter across the lawn. Shall we tell him?

Anstruther. Yes, why not? (*goes down* L. *a little*)

Muriel. Yes, we'll tell him. (*comes to* Colonel) Oh, Miles, there's one thing I—I want to ask you. If Walter were ever in great trouble, you'd help him, wouldn't you?

Anstruther. (*surprised*) Why—of course, darling. (*recovered, takes her hands*) But to-night we won't talk of trouble, only of the great happiness that has come to us.

(*Singing swells.*)

(*Enter* Mannering, L. C. Muriel *goes to desk* L.)

Mannering. (*down* R. C.) I don't know whether you know it, Muriel, but every one's asking where you are.

Muriel. (C.) Well, dear—here I am.

Mannering. Why don't you listen to the songs?

Anstruther. (L. C.) To tell you the truth, we've had a duet in here.

Mannering. A duet?

Anstruther. Yes, a love duet. And it went admirably, didn't it, Muriel?

Muriel. Walter—can't you guess?

Mannering. Why—surely, surely, you don't mean that——

Anstruther. Why, what else could it mean, my brother-in-law elect?

(*Singing ceases, loud applause and cheering heard, "Bravo! Encore! Major!" etc.*)

Mannering. Your brother-in-law? Muriel——

Muriel. Yes!

Mannering. It isn't possible. (*goes to down* R.) No, no—I won't believe it. (*turns to them*) Muriel, I told you to-night——

Muriel. Walter! (*goes to* Anstruther)

Anstruther. You've an odd way of congratulating us!

(*Stop applause.*)

Mannering. I didn't mean that. It's all so sudden—so utterly unexpected. You don't give one time to think.

Anstruther. (*takes her hand*) We didn't give each other time to think. It just happened. (*goes up to fire*)

Muriel. (*crosses to* Walter, *watching* Anstruther *as he goes up, and then speaks with deep meaning*) And now you're to *wish us joy.*

Mannering. Yes, I—I do that, of course.

Anstruther. One would think we had told you some appalling news.

Muriel. (*going to* Anstruther) No, no, he's surprised, that's all.

(*Enter* MAJOR BINGHAM, L. C., *he goes to top end of piano.*)

BINGHAM. I've done it. I've been singing.

ANSTRUTHER. Capital, Kit. What did you give them ?

(MURIEL *looks compassionately at* BINGHAM.)

BINGHAM. (*takes up photo frame*) I sang " Love's Old Sweet Song." I'd rather have sung, " Let me like a Soldier fall," but it's a little unsoldierly to start off with a request to be allowed to fall.

ANSTRUTHER. Kit, your spirits are irrepressible.

BINGHAM. Are they ? Do I convey the idea of being cheery ?

(MURIEL *goes up to* BINGHAM. ANSTRUTHER *goes to desk, places his cheque-book under the blotting-pad.*)

MURIEL. (*up* R. C.) You convey the idea of being as good as gold.

(*Exit off* L. C.)

ANSTRUTHER. (*coming to* BINGHAM, *places his hands on his shoulders*) As good as gold. (*in a low voice*) Has he got your cheque ?

BINGHAM. (*also in a low voice*) No, not yet. I've written it out, but I haven't had a chance to give it to him.

ANSTRUTHER. (*as before*) You might give it now. I'll get out of the way.

BINGHAM. (*as before*) Yes.

(*Exit* ANSTRUTHER *off* L. C.)

Mannering. Oh, it's horrible—awful!

Bingham. What's horrible, eh?

Mannering. Binks! I thought you'd gone.

Bingham. But you're right. Getting up to the neck in debt is horrible. What the devil d'you mean by it? (*moves chair from* L. *of piano chair* R. *to above it*)

Mannering. That's my business, Major.

Bingham. Is it? I should have thought it was your creditors'.

Mannering. Well! Are you a creditor?

Bingham. No, but I hope to be.

Mannering. Really? In what capacity?

Bingham. I want to lend you money.

Mannering. *You*—want to lend *me*—money?

Bingham. Yes, surprising, isn't it?

Mannering. I'm afraid your sense of humour—— (*looks away to* R.)

Bingham. Humour! D'you imagine I'm trying to be funny? Good heavens, man, if you only knew. Now, look here, d'you see this cheque. Take it, man. Look at it! It won't bite you.

Mannering. (*looks at* Bingham, *then at cheque*) What! Three thousand pounds payable to me!

Bingham. Is it enough?

Mannering. It would be, of course—if it were genuine, and if I could take it.

Bingham. Genuine! Of course it's genuine. I'm not an Exeter Hall stockbroker. You've got to take it. For the credit of the regiment. We can't

let you go a mucker. I charge two per cent.—perhaps three. I can't let you have it for nothing. It's not a bit of good your asking.

Mannering. But, Major, you always said you hadn't a sou ?

Bingham. Oh ! Oh, yes, I know. But Aunt Geraldine died last week, poor soul. (*fidgets with cheque*)

Mannering. What ?

Bingham. Yes, sad case, dropsy—she became enormous. It was a great blow, but a happy release.

Mannering. But weren't you at the Gunner's Ball last night ?

Bingham. Oh ? I at the Gun—oh, yes—I was. You see she was a distant aunt, (*a step to* c.) twice removed—once by marriage (*a step to* l. c.) once by divorce. Walter, old fellow, take the money, and don't argue. I can't go on like this. I can't keep it up—I'm out of sorts, out of spirits and—wretched.

Mannering. And you really mean it for me ?

(*Song and chorus heard in distance, "Say au revoir."*)

Bingham. Yes, honour bright.

Mannering. Then I haven't any words to thank you with. It's an act of generosity—of charity, that I can't conceive. It staggers me.

Bingham. Don't you worry. You get out of debt.

Mannering. I'm ashamed to accept it. But it means so much—not only to me, but to Muriel——

Bingham. To her ?

Mannering. Yes, I can't explain, but it's true. And I take it, Major, more for her sake than for mine. But how to thank you——

Bingham. It's all right, Walter, don't try.

Mannering. Binks! (*offers his hand*)

Bingham. (*shakes hands*) Jolly night, isn't it? (*goes up and stirs fire*)

(*Enter* Medenham *with tray, comes to up* L. C.)

Ah! just in time. The strain is too great. But Providence provides a lubricant for the wheel of destiny.

(*Enter* Anstruther *through window up* L.)

Anstruther. Ah! that's all right. I came to see that you'd got everything. Let's see. Yes, cigars, cigarettes, whisky and soda. All right, Medenham, you can go. Got all you want, Walter?

(*Exit* Medenham, R.)

Mannering. Yes, thank you, sir. (*goes down to* L. *with glass of whisky and soda*)

Anstruther. Now then, I'm going to give you a toast. Something (*pours out*) very wonderful has happened to-night, and we're going to pour out a libation at the altar of Hymen.

Bingham. (*crosses to* R.) Did you say Hymen?

Anstruther. (*holds up his glass*) Yes; here's to the future Mrs. Anstruther.

(*Singing ceases.*)

Mannering. (*anxiously*) One moment, Colonel.

(*goes up to table* L. C., *places his glass on it*) May—may I speak to you?

ANSTRUTHER. Yes, of course, what is it?

MANNERING. There's something I must tell you—no, please, Major, don't go. It concerns you as well, and you ought to hear. I—I was—it's difficult. (*goes down* L.)

ANSTRUTHER. Walter, what—what *are* you driving at?

MANNERING. Till a moment ago, sir, I believed I should have to send in my papers to-morrow and give up soldiering. It was on account of money matters. To-night I must have been mad—I told Muriel that my only chance of salvation lay in her marriage with a rich man. And I—— (*faces up* L.) I'll make a clean breast of it—I was cad enough to suggest it to her. Then I saw what an awful—brutal thing I'd done, and I begged her to forget that I had ever dreamt of it Conceive my horror when you told me the very thing I dreaded had come about.

ANSTRUTHER. I can hardly believe that you realize what you're saying now.

MANNERING. It's true, sir. (*turns away*) I know how vilely I've behaved. I know I'll have to exchange, that I'm not fit to serve in your own regiment.

ANSTRUTHER. It's not a question of that. (*places glass on tray*) It's what you say about your sister. (*down* L. C.) You mean that she, simply for your ends, was ready to become my wife. Is that what you ask me to believe?

Mannering. Yes, indeed, sir, it's true.

(Bingham *turns to down* R.)

And I'm only speaking now to save what might be a life of wretchedness for both of you. When I first spoke to her of it, she was horrified. She said the bare idea was horrible—revolting.

Anstruther. She used the words horrible—revolting ?

Mannering. Yes, sir. Those were her very words.

Anstruther. And, with me, she was only acting a part ?

Mannering. Yes, sir. Ah ! don't you see. You don't know what she'd do or sacrifice for me, utterly worthless as I am. And now, thanks to an act of generosity that nothing on earth can ever repay—

(Bingham *moves a step and back uneasily.*)

the very reason of her sacrifice has ceased to exist.

Anstruther. I don't understand you.

Mannering. Major Bingham has lent me money. More even than is necessary.

Bingham. (*turns to them*) Look here, I really can't go on posing like this. The very money you speak of——

Anstruther. Shows, Kit, that you have the credit of the regiment at heart, and I'm glad to hear of what you've done.

Bingham. But, Colonel——

Anstruther. Kit! But even now, I'm not sure I'm justified in accepting all you've told me.

Mannering (*a step to* c.) It's the truth, sir. She had bound herself to our mother to—to look to me, to my welfare, and—I—I—can't go on. I can't tell you more. (*turns to* l., *faces up stage*)

Bingham. In a way, you know, I can.

Anstruther. You?

Bingham. Yes; I gave a promise not to speak of a certain arrangement that she and I had come to. But now, if it helps you to arrive at a conclusion, and above all, if it saves her from unhappiness, then I think I ought to speak.

Anstruther. Well?

Bingham. Till to-night, Colonel, Miss Mannering and I were engaged.

Anstruther. What?

Mannering. Muriel told me so herself. Of course I'd no idea of that when I suggested—what I did.

Bingham. It happened a week ago, but to-night she broke it off. I couldn't understand it at the time, but now I begin to see.

Anstruther. I remember now, she said she wasn't free. Not free! That means you—you. And she honestly loves you?

(Bingham *flinches.*)

Mannering. She told me so herself, only to-night.

(Anstruther *motions* Mannering *to be silent, then*

he goes to BINGHAM, *places his hand on his shoulder.*)

ANSTRUTHER. You're quite sure of that?

BINGHAM. Eh, what? What are you talking about?

ANSTRUTHER. Kit, I know you're trying to let me down gently. (*removes his hand*) But all's fair in love and war, and if I've lost—well, I've lost. (*hand on shoulder*) She really loves you?

BINGHAM. All's fair—oh! you asked me that? Yes. Oh, yes, you see—she even told Walter. (*looks at* ANSTRUTHER) The thing is, what's to be done? (*turns away to* R.)

ANSTRUTHER. I'll arrange it somehow. It's like a bird being caught in a net; the wings must be set free gently. One thing is certain. (*to both*) She must be spared the knowledge of what has passed between us. That she must never know.

BINGHAM. Yes! But how?

ANSTRUTHER. I can't tell you yet, but before we sail she'll be free. (*going up* C.) A story of entanglement with some other woman would do; I'll break it off somehow. (*at fireplace*) That you must leave to me.

(*Enter* MURIEL, L. C. *When she enters,* ANSTRUTHER *turns round to her.* MANNERING *stands up.* BINGHAM, *places his glass on piano, then stands facing to* R.)

MURIEL. The concert's nearly over. Lady Har-

burgh and the others are coming up. How solemn you all look! I believe you're glad we're going and longing to smoke pipes. I feel as if I'd come out of summer into mid-winter.

BINGHAM. Yes, it's a draughty room. And the fire is almost out.

(*Chorus singing "Wrap me up in my old stable jacket" in distance.*)

MURIEL. (*to* ANSTRUTHER) Miles—surely—surely Major Bingham doesn't know.

ANSTRUTHER. Yes, he's found it out.

MURIEL. Who told him?

ANSTRUTHER. I did.

MURIEL. Miles, how could you?

ANSTRUTHER. Why shouldn't he know?

MURIEL. Because—I'll tell you later. (*looks at* MANNERING) I must speak to him. Major Bingham. (*in low voice*) Kit, I wanted to break——

BINGHAM. Eh? What! Oh, that's all right. Awfully jolly evening, isn't it? (*goes up* R. *of piano to* R. C. *above it.*)

(*Chatter heard off* L. *Enter* LADY HARBURGH, *followed by* NORAH, HILDEBRAND *and* BARKER. MANNERING *crosses to* R. *and exits.*)

LADY HARBURGH. (*by* ANSTRUTHER *up* L. C.) My dear Colonel Anstruther, you've given us the most delightful evening, so idyllic, so pastoral.

NORAH. (*seated* L. *of piano*) It's been perfectly heavenly. Oh! Muriel, who wouldn't be a soldier?

Hildebrand. (*up* L. C. *back of settee*) I, for one.

(Barker *by* Norah.)

Norah. No, you never would. Look at yourself.

Hildebrand. I am looking at Mr. Barker.

(Barker *retires to up* R.)

Anstruther. I'm glad you enjoyed the camp fire.

Lady Harburgh. Ah! but you missed Major Bingham's song. And he sang it so originally. I'd never heard "Love's old sweet song" given humorously before.

Bingham. (*comes* C.) Did it sound funny?

Lady Harburgh. Oh, immensely! But you ought to insist on the man at the piano changing key when you do.

(Bingham *goes to* R.)

Now, come along, children. I won't keep the horses waiting. So good-night, Colonel Anstruther.

Anstruther. Good-night.

Lady Harburgh. You'll see us to the carriage, won't you, Major Bingham?

Bingham. Pleasure, pleasure.

Lady Harburgh. It's been a perfectly charming experience.

Bingham. Yes, awfully jolly evening, isn't it?

(Lady Harburgh, Hildebrand, Barker, Norah *and* Bingham *exeunt.*)

Muriel. (*comes to* L.) Good-night, Miles.

Anstruther. Good-night, good-bye.

(*A bugle sounds "Lights out."*)

Muriel. What is that?

Anstruther. It's lights out. The last call of the day.

Muriel. The last call. How sad it sounds.

Anstruther. Yes, everything has an end.

Muriel. Not everything, Miles.

Anstruther. No?

(*Enter* Major Bingham. *Seeing them he goes a little* r., *and stands with his back to them.*)

Bingham. Lady Harburgh says they're all waiting.

Muriel. I'm coming. (*gives wrap to* Anstruther; *he places it round her*) Good-night, Miles. (*looks up in his face, waiting to be kissed*)

Anstruther. (*extends his hand, coldly*) Good-bye.

Bingham. The horses have been standing half an hour.

Muriel. I'm coming. (*goes up* c.) Good-night, Kit.

Bingham. Good-night.

(Muriel *gives her hand to* Bingham; *he turns and takes it as if to kiss her, then ends quietly saying "Good-night."*)

(Muriel *goes slowly out to* l. c.)

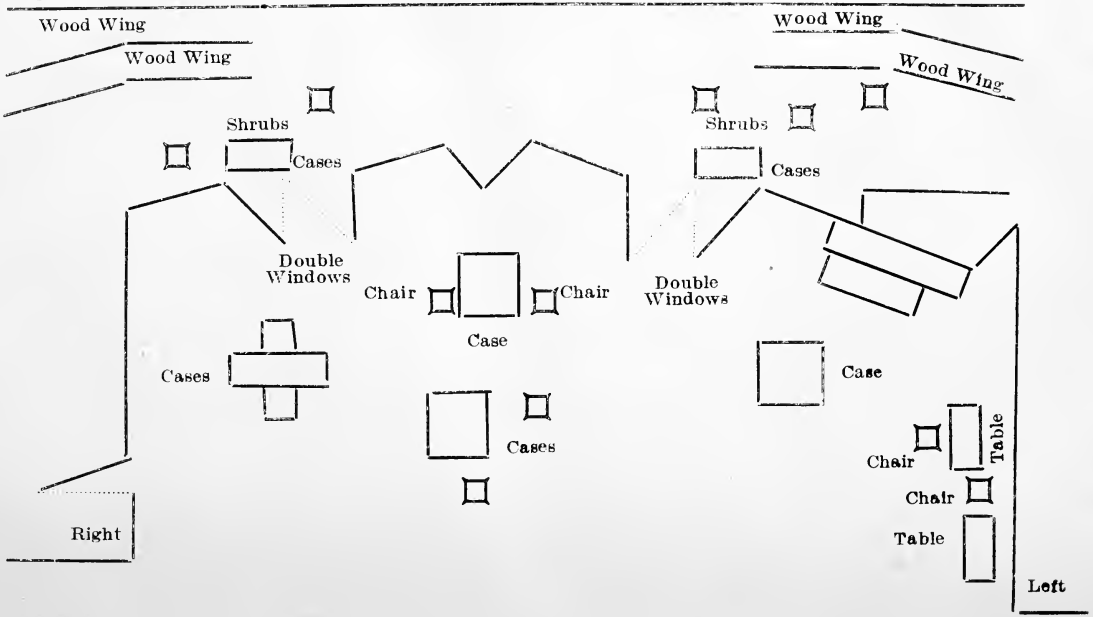
(*Bugle repeats "Lights out."*)

Slow curtain on second part of bugle.

ACT III

Piles of packing-cases outside each window.
Large case C., small case L. of it, small case above it.
One case laid on top of another to make them rock, R. C.
Packing-case L. C., two cases and two wooden chairs up C.
Two tables down L., chair R. of each.
Straw littered about stage; carpet up.
Hammer and nails—hammer left on box in C. by Medenham, and taken away by Hartopp after entering with beer, sandwiches, etc.
Bugler and bugle for calls.
Letter from Lady Harburgh for Bingham on box L. C., handed to Bingham by Hartopp.
Tray, sandwiches, beer, etc., including drinking glasses for *two*.
Norah's three parcels—alarm clock in box, to have lever for bell; soldier's pocket-book; pocket medicine chest.
Telegram for Anstruther's entry.
Chains for artillery horses.
Letter (sealed) Bingham to hand to Muriel.

ACT III. Same Scene as Act I.



ACT III.

SCENE.—*Ante-room of Officers' Mess, dismantled.* TROOPERS *in kharki uniform and helmets are seen at intervals without, engaged in baggage fatigue, etc.*

(*As curtain rises,* HARTOPP *seated on case* C., *also* MEDENHAM, *hammering nails into a packing-case.*)

MEDENHAM. (*rises*) Thank 'Eaven, that's the last bloomin' nail driven 'ome.

HARTOPP. Whew! It's 'ot!

MEDENHAM. It's 'otter where we're bound for. An' no four half to keep the barometer down.

HARTOPP. No, nor yet a bloomin' female to be seen for a 'undred miles at a stretch.

MEDENHAM. So ye'll 'ave to give your morals a chance, whether ye like it or not.

HARTOPP. We'll have the Chaplain startin' a flirtation with our religious emotions.

MEDENHAM. 'Ere! Where's that scrimshankin' fatigue party?

HARTOPP. I don't know.

MEDENHAM. Hi! Corporal!

HARTOPP. They're a lazy set o' swabs! The "Turn Out" 'll go in half an hour's time.

Medenham. 'Ere ye are!

(*Enter* Corporal *and two* Troopers.)

Corporal. All this tack ready?

Medenham. Yes, take it away for the love of yer bloomin' country.

Corporal. (*down* R. C.) What, all of it?

Hartopp. (C.) Only the tack marked South Africa; the rest stops behind to be stored. You don't want fenders and carpets in action.

Corporal. Who said yer did! (*to the* Men *up stage*) Get on to it, lads. (*to* Hartopp) I'm about fed up with this baggage fatigue; I've been at it six hours.

Hartopp. Don't you like it?

Corporal. Yes, just about as much as you do; here, have you a bottle of beer handy?

Hartopp. Yes, I have.

Corporal. Then fetch it here; there's a bloomin' drought in my throat.

Hartopp. I wish I could, Corporal; but I'm a selfish man I am, and I'm keeping it for myself.

(*Bugle heard in distance "Fatigue Call"* D. T. *bell.*)

Corporal. Well, that's won it. You're a bloomin' fine comrade soldier, you are! Now then, lads, off ye get, and heave the tack on the squadron cart.

(*Exeunt* Corporal *and* Men.)

Hartopp. Just see if them sandwiches is ready

for the Colonel and the Major. They've 'ad nothing since breakfast.

Medenham. Right!

(*Two* Officers *cross from* R. *to* L.)

Hartopp. And ye'll find a dozen of beer below stairs, 'idden under a blanket. Ye can trust Tommy Atkins when 'e's on fatigue.

Medenham. Right you are.

(*Exit.*)

Hartopp. (*sings*)

Oh, it's Tommy, Tommy Atkins,
You're a good 'un 'eart and 'and,
Ye're a credit to yer country
And to all yer——

(*Enter* Major Bingham *up* R.)

Beg pardon (*draws left arm across forehead*), sir, this note came for you, sir. (*gets it from* L. C. *on box*)

Bingham. Thank you; get some sandwiches—enough for two. The Colonel's coming.

Hartopp. Yes, sir.

(*Exit.*)

Bingham. (*opening letter*) From Lady Harburgh? Ah! I thought so. "The girls and I are coming to see you off, to say good-bye." I call that rubbing it in. A sort of valedictory message with a liniment of tears. (*tears up letter*)

(*Enter* Colonel Anstruther, L. C.)

Anstruther. Anything to eat, Kit? (*down* L. C.)

Bingham. (*up* R. C.) It's coming, sir.

Anstruther. Have you heard about young Carstairs? (*takes off helmet*)

Bingham. No!

Anstruther. He's enlisted in the Imperial Yeomanry. (*places helmet and gloves on lower end of box* C.)

(*Enter down* R. Medenham *with tray, sandwiches, beer, etc., which he places on up stage end of box* C., *and takes away hammer that* Hartopp *has left.*)

Bingham. What!

Anstruther. Yes; in the contingent they've raised locally. They marched in here this morning; I saw him.

Bingham. What! In barracks!

(*He sits on box* R. C. *above box* C.)

Trooper the Honourable Hildebrand Carstairs. 'Pon my word, Colonel, our upper classes are crowding out the lower ones even at their own jobs. Army, navy, stage, trade—why, I believe when they go to gaol they insist on such cells as have a southern exposure. (*both drink, then take up sandwiches*) Miles, if you don't mind my asking, what has happened about—Miss Mannering?

Anstruther. (*places sandwich on tray*) I've written a letter. (*throws sandwich on plate*) She'll get it after we've gone. I've made it as easy for her as possible, and put it as if she had no choice but to throw me over. And I've told, indeed, ordered

young Mannering to tell her that I'm a man who loves one day and rides off the next.

BINGHAM. But haven't you seen her since that night?

ANSTRUTHER. (*takes up glass*) No, she wrote and asked me to, but I pleaded pressure of work. She must have guessed that something's wrong. (*drinks*)

BINGHAM. (*places sandwiches on plate*) There's always the off chance, you know, that she does really love you.

ANSTRUTHER. (*places glass down*) No, it was all for him, for Walter. She was acting a part with me. Besides, my dear Kit, you were everything to her till I and my guineas came upon the scene.

BINGHAM. Yes, but you've only my word for that. (*rises*)

ANSTRUTHER. That's enough for me. (*picks up straw*) But Walter told me so as well.

BINGHAM. (*puts on gloves*) Suppose I were only an ordinary vulgar liar, that I couldn't bear to lose her, that I knew she didn't care for me, that I wilfully threw dust in your eyes—what then?

ANSTRUTHER. Nothing. I shouldn't believe it, Kit. If we're nothing else, at least we're men of honour.

BINGHAM. I suppose we are—theoretically.

ANSTRUTHER. No, Kit, my dear boy. I lay awake all night after she'd gone and tried the case as if before a jury of average intelligence. The in-

dictment charged her on two counts. First, self-sacrifice; second, love. The jury found her guilty of the first, not guilty of the second. I fell asleep at 5 a.m., and was up on parade at 6.30. A summer morning, and yet I never felt the air so chilly in my life.

Bingham. Miles, it's bad luck. (*takes off gloves again*)

Anstruther. (*throws straw away*) It's more than that. (*takes up glass*) It's the awful want of interest in one's ordinary life, in work and duty; the utter blankness of it all. It's the sudden closing of a book that holds the only secret in life. (*places glass on box*)

Bingham. Don't I know it. I've been trying to read that book for years.

Anstruther. (*rises, comes to* Bingham) Kit, all this gives you another innings.

Bingham. Eh?

Anstruther. Don't you see?

Bingham. No, no! She'd never come back to me. She'd be ashamed to, and I to ask her. So last night in packing up I took my poor battered old heart, laid it in lavender of memory, folded it in brown paper of experience, and locked it away in the archives of the "might have been." Nothing matters now.

Anstruther. No? Not even going on service with the finest regiment a man could command.

Bingham. It dwarfs things, doesn't it? Love is

so ridiculously primitive, a sort of prehistoric peep. Miles, there's only one plan of action I can recommend. Forget it all.

ANSTRUTHER. Yes.

BINGHAM. Love's a fever, and work the only possible quinine. Think only of the fighting that's ahead of us.

ANSTRUTHER. Right!

BINGHAM. And nothing else!

ANSTRUTHER. Nothing else!

BINGHAM. She's coming to say good-bye.

ANSTRUTHER. What, here?

BINGHAM. Yes, dear, good woman! Oh, it's awful, isn't it?

ANSTRUTHER. Kit, we're scarcely forgetting. (*goes up to fireplace*)

BINGHAM. No; I'm not sure that after all there isn't a sort of maddening comfort in remembering. (*goes down* R.)

(*Enter up* R., NORAH *with three parcels.*)

NORAH. Please, Colonel Anstruther, may I come in? (*comes down* R. C.)

ANSTRUTHER. Miss Vining. (*comes down* L. C.) Yes, of course. Come to say good-bye?

NORAH. (*shakes hands with* ANSTRUTHER *and* BINGHAM) Yes; Aunt Agatha and Muriel are trying to find Hildebrand. You know it's all my fault.

BINGHAM. (R.) What is?

Norah. (R. C.) Hildebrand's joining the Yeomanry.

Anstruther. (L. C.) Is it?

Norah. Yes, I made him promise to be quite teetotal till he got an appointment of some sort. Well, the very next morning he left us, saying he was off for two days' shooting. And only this morning we heard what he'd done.

Bingham. But he kept his promise? About not drinking?

Norah. Oh, yes; Hildebrand's frightfully honourable, even in the hottest weather.

Anstruther. Oh! Even in the hottest weather. (*goes up* R. *to window*) I'll send for him. He's probably hard at work at the Goose-step!

Norah. (C.) That would be good of you. Oh, please, just before you go, I want to give you this as a talisman.

(Bingham *retires a little up* R.)

Anstruther. That's really very kind. What is it? (*comes down* R. C.)

Norah. An alarm clock. I thought it would be useful in camp, for getting up at night with, when you expect the enemy.

Anstruther. My dear Miss Vining, what a brilliant idea! I'll have it packed at once. It is good of you. (*goes up to window* R.)

(*Alarm bell rings off* R. *Both men laugh.*)

(*Exit* Anstruther.)

Norah. Thank you. (*goes to* L. C.) And this is for you, Major Bingham.

Bingham. (*comes* C.) Really for me? Now, what is it? (*opens it*)

Norah. Yes, it's the soldier's pocket-book. I don't know why it's so large. But if you find yourself in danger during action, you've only got to turn to Chapter Five, and you'll see what to do.

Bingham. My dear Norah, how awfully good of you; you've probably saved my life. (*shakes her hands*)

(*Enter* Hildebrand *up* R.)

Norah. Oh, look. (*goes up* R. *to* R. C.) Here's Hildebrand; isn't it awful?

(Hildebrand *pushes her away gently but firmly.*)

Norah. (*up* R. C.) Hildebrand!

Bingham. (C.) Well, Carstairs.

Hildebrand. (*extends his right hand, saying*) How d'ye do? (*then salutes again with his left hand.* R., *to* Norah) Be good enough to remember what I am. There is an officer present.

Bingham. Eh? Oh, ah, I see. (*goes up, gets helmet*) Would you think it very rude of me if I left you two together?

Norah. Why, no, of course not.

Bingham. I'll stay if you like.

Norah. Oh, no, don't, please!

Bingham. Then I'm off. (*takes her a step up*)

And in case Lady Harburgh doesn't see him again, will you kiss him once for his mother?

Norah. I'll—I'll try.

Bingham. Then I fancy you'll succeed.

(*Exit off* L. C.)

Norah. Oh, Billy, why did you?

Hildebrand. I'm an Imperial Yeoman, and I did it for you.

Norah I know, oh, why did you?

Hildebrand. It's not a thing to be ashamed of. I may not look Imperial, but I am!

Norah. I know, but it—it doesn't fit.

Hildebrand. The uniform is baggy, but the Royal Arms are on every button.

Norah. Billy, I am proud of you. You'll get your Commission, I know you will!

Hildebrand. And if I do, you'll really——

Norah. Look, here's a keepsake.

Hildebrand. What is it? (*they go. Sit on easy chair* R.)

Norah. Open it and see. Yes, it's a pocket medicine chest; you'll find something there for almost every fever or disease you're likely to get.

Hildebrand. It's awfully good of you——

Norah. Look there——

Hildebrand. "From your own loving Norah!" My darling! (*they embrace*)

Norah. Billy!

Hildebrand. This finishes Barker, eh?

Norah. Oh, yes, quite. (*another embrace*) You'll be careful to use the right medicines, won't you ?

Hildebrand. Yes, dearest, if there's occasion to.

Norah. A medicine chest won't be much good if—if nothing happens.

Hildebrand. Suppose—suppose something did happen to me ? Would you marry some one else ?

Norah. Only if I thought you wished it.

Hildebrand. Barker, I suppose ?

(*Returns box to* Norah ; *gets up. Box tips up, letting* Norah's *end down. Then he sits with his back to* Norah, *which tips her end of box up again.*)

Norah. Oh, but—well—if—having known Mr. Barker, you felt that he could fill your—your vacant chair.

Hildebrand. No, thank you. (*turns on box, his back to audience*) Barker sits on me quite enough as it is.

Norah. (*turns round to him*) Hil—Hilde—Hildebrand !

Hildebrand. Norah !

Norah. Billy ! (*cries*)

(*They embrace, both facing up stage.*)

Hildebrand. I say, you know, don't cry before the thing happens. One can't live backwards like that.

Norah. (*rises*) Hush ! Here he comes. (*goes up* r. c.)

Hildebrand. Barker ! (*rises*)

Norah. Yes.

Hildebrand. And I shall have to salute *him.* (*goes over to extreme* L.) Barker! *I*—to salute *Barker!*

(*Enter* Barker *up* R. Hildebrand *salutes, facing audience.*)

Barker. (*up* R. C.) Miss Vining! Come to see the last of us? (*shakes hands*)

Norah. Yes; we've come to say good-bye.

Barker. Well, I'm awfully pleased.

(Hildebrand *is still saluting.*)

All right, my lad; you needn't salute all day. Who are you? What do you belong to?

Hildebrand. I'm an Imperial Yeoman, sir.

(Hildebrand *stops saluting, and tries to tighten in his tunic.*)

Norah. Mr. Barker, it's—it's Hildebrand.

Barker. (*comes down* R. C. *to* C.) What! Good Lord, so it is!

(*Turns to* Norah, *who has come down* R. *of him.*)

Norah. Be very gentle to him. He's only been in the arm y a day and a half, and he finds discipline a little irksome.

Barker. (*comes down to* Hildebrand, L. C., Hildebrand *salutes*) I heard you'd done this. If there's any advice I can give you, let me know!

Hildebrand. I am much obliged, sir, but I'm an Imperial Yeoman, and prefer to be independent!

Barker. As you please. (*goes up* L. C.)

Norah. (*down* R. C.) Billy, don't be pompous. You *know* you'll be sea-sick.

Hildebrand. That might happen to a Field Marshal.

Lady Harburgh. (*outside*) Here, you say?

Norah. Aunt Agatha! (*goes up to* Barker, R. C.)

(*Enter* Lady Harburgh *up* R.)

Lady Harburgh. At last! Hildebrand! What have you done? (*comes down* R. C.)

Hildebrand. (*comes* C.) It's all right, mother. I've only done what any man has a right to do.

Lady Harburgh. How dare you take this step without consulting me?

Hildebrand. I couldn't help it, mother; the blood of the Maslachlans has been rousing me lately.

Lady Harburgh. Have you seen yourself in a mirror in this—this fancy costume?

Hildebrand. No, mother.

(*Exeunt* Norah *and* Barker *off up* R.)

Lady Harburgh. Then I wish you had before enlisting. And when, pray, do you start for South Africa?

Hildebrand. In a fortnight, I believe; we're attached here for drill. I find it awfully confusing. One's feet seem to get in the way, somehow.

Lady Harburgh. You told me you were off for two days' shooting.

Hildebrand. So I was—at target.

Lady Harburgh. And how do you, with your experience, propose to conduct yourself in action?

Hildebrand. I don't know; I suppose I'll hack and slash about in the usual way. Look here, mother, it's all right, it's the only thing I could do. I've failed in everything else. I should only have drifted into an idle, hopeless, probably dissipated ne'er-do-well, and I know soldiering will pull me up. Besides, they want men that can ride and shoot, and that's all I'm good for. Come, be a Spartan mother.

Lady Harburgh. For the moment I forget the characteristics of the Spartan parent, but to-day I will have you measured for warm flannel clothing.

Hildebrand. But we are going to a tropical climate.

Lady Harburgh. Tropical or not, I am a mother, and you will be provided with the thickest flannel clothing that the local tradesmen can supply.

Hildebrand. Thanks; I am glad the uniform is baggy. (*goes to* R.)

Lady Harburgh. Hildebrand. (*comes to* C.)

Hildebrand. Yes, mother? (*comes to* R. C.)

Lady Harburgh. I think on the whole I'm proud of you.

Hildebrand. Ah, that's right! Mother, you're a brick!

(*Enter up* R., Sergeant.)

Sergeant. Trooper Carstairs!

Hildebrand. Yes, Sergeant?

Sergeant. You've got to fall in for drill.

Hildebrand. All right, Sergeant, I'm coming. (*goes up* R.)

Sergeant. In the riding school.

Hildebrand. Right!

(*Exit* Sergeant.)

I must be off, mater.

Lady Harburgh. (*has gone up*) I'm coming to see you drill.

Hildebrand. Oh, I say, mother, don't do that; I get so nervous and mixed up with my feet.

Lady Harburgh. I'm coming to see you drill.

Hildebrand. Well, if you insist upon it, but don't go telling everybody you're my mother.

(*Exeunt off up* R.)

(*Enter* Mannering *from* L. C.)

Mannering. (R. C.) Hartopp!

Hartopp. (*without*) Yes, sir.

Mannering. Bring my helmet—at the double.

Hartopp. Yes, sir—coming, sir.

(*Enter* Hartopp, R., *with helmet.*)

Mannering. What's the time?

Hartopp. (*goes up—looks off* C.) Three o'clock, sir. The turn-out will go in about half an hour. (*comes to* Walter *and arranges his sword-belt*)

(*Enter* Muriel R., *with an* Officer.)

Muriel. There you are, Walter!

(*Thanks* Officer, *who salutes and goes off*.).

Mannering. Muriel! All right, Hartopp, that'll do.

(*An* Officer *crosses from* L. *to* R. *at back.*)

(*Exit* Hartopp, L. C.)

Muriel. So the last few minutes have come.

Mannering. Yes—I thought you were in the Barrack Square. I was coming to say good-bye.

Muriel. Tell me, Walter, you're quite clear of all difficulties now?

Mannering. Yes, thanks to dear old Binks.

Muriel. Walter—it seems horribly selfish to speak of my own troubles just when you're going—but since Miles asked me to be his wife only two days ago, I've never seen him nor heard from him. What does it mean?

Mannering. (*turns away*) He's been up to the eyes in work. (*a step to* L.)

Muriel. Yes—but surely—even then——

Mannering. And then he's not too reliable in love affairs. (*a step to* L.)

Muriel. What? You mean——

Mannering. I mean he's the sort of man that loves and rides away.

Muriel. (R. C.) Walter!

Mannering. (L. C.) There are men like that, you know—men who like climbing a cliff to a flower that seems beyond their reach; but once they've torn it from the stem they'll throw it to any passer-by.

Muriel. I can't—I won't believe it of *him*.

Mannering. It depends on the point of view. You first of all refused and then you accepted him. You can hardly be surprised if—finding that meantime you had thrown over poor Binks, he shuffles the pack again and have a fresh deal.

Muriel. You should be the last to tell me that.

Mannering. Muriel, dear, I only said that was one point of view; it isn't mine. D'you think I don't know that you meant to be more than a sister to me! But the sacrifice would have made both our lives utterly miserable. There! Don't let us be wretched in the last moment left. Things will come out all right in the long run.

Muriel. Yes, I'm sure they will, for I can't believe what you've told me.

Mannering. Anyhow, I've warned you. (*a step up*) Muriel, you don't love him?

Muriel. You may be quite sure that I could never love the man you've described.

Mannering. Yes, but look here——

Voice. (*off* r.) Where's Mannering?

(*Enter* Bingham, c.)

Mannering. Hullo, that's the Adjutant shouting for me; more baggage fatigue, I suppose. You'll come and see us on parade, won't you?

Muriel. Yes, Walter, and then we'll say good-bye.

Mannering. Ah, that's all right.

(*Exit* r.)

Bingham. How d'ye do, Miss Mannering? I'm

awfully sorry, Miss Mannering, intruding like this on you and your brother.

Muriel. (*sits on case up* c.) No, no, he only went because the Adjutant wanted him.

Bingham. (*up* r. c.) I see—but (*places hat, etc., on case down* r.) You mustn't be down on your luck, you know. You ought to be as cheery as possible. A campaign is such a glorious chance for all of us. By Jove! It's magnificent. When the charge goes, and you're well back in the saddle, with legs like a vice, with the rattle and roar, the clash and thunder and glitter of it all—Oh! it's splendid! (*goes to* l.)

Muriel. Oh, then, you've seen active service?

Bingham. Eh—well—no, I haven't. But I take in all the illustrated papers. (*foot on chair* l., *arranges puttee*)

Muriel. I'm quite sure of one thing—that you'll always be the bravest of soldiers—just as I know you to be the soul of honour.

Bingham. The soul of honour—am I—that?

Muriel. Are you not?

Bingham. (*foot off chair*) Possibly—allowing for occasional lapses.

Muriel. Why? There's nothing you've ever done that you're ashamed of?

Bingham. (*looks at her*) Yes, there is, but I haven't the pluck to tell you. (*turns away*)

Muriel (*rises, comes down* c. *to him*) You—you've forgiven and forgotten all the pain I caused you?

Bingham. Oh, it's all right. The very best thing in the world is happening—we're off on service. And nothing can ever rob me of the memory that once, for a time, our hands were clasped, and I was the happiest man in the whole broad world.

(Muriel *offers her hand.* Bingham *holds it in both hands.*)

That's a story that I'll whisper to the winds and trees and stars of South Africa every night. But no one else shall know.

Muriel. (*moves to* r. c.) You see, I never knew what love meant till Miles came—and then the whole world seemed to burst into blossom——

Bingham. But—but surely it was to help Walter —you don't—you can't mean that——

Muriel. (*turns to him*) Yes, Kit, I do, Miles is all the world to me.

Bingham. I never knew that. I thought——

Muriel. I tried not to let you see it. I knew how it would pain you. (*goes* l.)

Bingham. And I believed it was all for Walter's sake. Muriel! (*she turns*) I've a confession to make. (*he advances to speak*—Muriel *turns to him*) The fact is—no, I can't speak it—I haven't the pluck. But I'll write it now, you'll have it before the regiment goes, and then—well, then—you'll forgive me if you can.

Anstruther. (*without*) What! In the anteroom?

Corporal. (*without*) Yes, sir.

Muriel. (*goes up* r. c.) That's Colonel Anstruther's voice. Tell him I am here, that I *must* see him. Say I must speak to him.

(*Exit off* l. c.)

Bingham. I'll tell him.

(*Enter* Colonel Anstruther *up* r.)

Are you looking for me, sir?

Anstruther. Kit, my boy, I've got bad news for you. (*hand on* Kit's *shoulder*)

Bingham. Bad news? Why—what?

Anstruther. I hardly know how to tell you.

Bingham. That's all right, sir—out with it. (*backs away a step*) I've had lots of training in bad luck.

Anstruther. You're—you're not to go with us. (*looking at telegram*)

Bingham. Not to go?

Anstruther. No.

Bingham. Not to go with the regiment?

Anstruther. (*reads telegram*) The order has just come from the Brigade Office. They're sending out Carlyon of the 7th on special service, and a Cavalry Major has got to take his place at Canterbury, and you've been detailed. Heaven and the War Office only know why they choose a man who is on the eve of sailing.

Bingham. *I* know.

Anstruther. You *do*?

Bingham. Yes, it's because I'm a hopeless duffer. It's—it's really true.

Anstruther. Yes, Kit, here's the order. (*offers telegram*)

Bingham. I see. Thanks, no, I don't want to read it.

Anstruther. (c.) I know what you're feeling, old fellow. (*hands on* Bingham's *shoulder*)

Bingham. Yes. (*crosses slowly to* r.) They've scored me off this time. They've got a bull's eye. They've kept back the man that they thought of least use in the field.

Anstruther. And they're wrong.

Bingham. (r.) I'm not so sure. It's the hardest thing that's ever happened to me in fifteen years' soldiering, and the first instance I remember of the War Office being probably wise.

Anstruther. (*hand on shoulder*) Anyhow, Kit, no one feels the loss of your services more deeply than I do. I'd have trusted you anywhere, and I know that on the field no braver man will carry a sword.

Bingham. Thanks, Colonel. I'm proud of your saying that. But I never was any good. I'd probably fire volleys into our own men, or reinforce the enemy, or do something damned silly.

Anstruther. But they say three more divisions are going out, and you can work it, Kit, with a little interest. You can follow us out later on. The General said there was a chance of that. (*hands on shoulders*)

Bingham. Did he?

Anstruther. Yes.

Bingham. He doesn't know my luck.

(Anstruther *turns up* L. *a step.*)

Bingham. Not going out! Not going with the regiment! Left—left behind! What the—why in Heaven's name——

Anstruther. Kit! (*severely*)

Bingham. I beg pardon, sir—I forgot—I've something to write and there's some one waiting to say good-bye to you.

Anstruther. Where?

Bingham. There! (*points off* L.) Not going out!

(Hartopp *enters down* R., *with* Major's *sword.*)

Hartopp. Your sword, sir. (*stands in doorway and salutes*)

Bingham. Thanks. I—I shan't want it.

Hartopp. Not want it, sir?

Bingham. No, I'm not for parade. (*waves* Hartopp *aside*)

(Hartopp *gets above door.*)

I'm left—left behind!

(*Exit down* R. Hartopp *follows, closing door.*)

Medenham. (*heard off* R.) Now then, fetch away this baggage—go on—at the double.

(*Sounds of a body of men running on stone. Chains clinking.* Colonel *goes to door* R., *showing his*

compassion for Bingham, *then turns and goes up* R. C. *and meets* Muriel *as she enters.*)

(*Enter* Muriel, L. C.)

Muriel. (*up* C.) Miles!

Anstruther. Miss Mannering! I'd no idea you were there till Kit—Major Bingham—told me. (*turns away to down* R. *a little*)

Muriel. (*comes to him*) Miss—what is it—are we not to——

Anstruther. No—I'm not worthy of that.

Muriel. I—I don't understand. You've never been near me, and every hour I've watched and waited. I kept indoors ever since—since that night—and every time I heard a step or the clatter of a horse I flew to the window—but—but—you never came. Then I thought you'd send a letter, and as the hour for the post drew near, I was in a fever, but all for nothing. I daren't leave the house for fear I should miss you, and at last—to-day—half afraid and half ashamed—I came here. As I passed in through the barrack gates, I felt my cheeks flaming. It seemed that every one was staring at me, and I didn't know where to turn. And then I found Walter——

Anstruther. (*not looking at her*) I've written a letter making everything clear; but I arranged that you shouldn't get it till after we'd gone.

Muriel. But why, Miles?

Anstruther. Because I'm not worthy of you.

Because I wanted to spare myself the pain of a last meeting.

Muriel. You mean that you regret—that you wish to draw back—that everything's to be over?

Anstruther. Yes.

Muriel. Really?

Anstruther. Yes.

Muriel. (*pause*) Very—well.

Anstruther. You must—throw me over.

Muriel. Yes.

Anstruther. As not fit to be your husband.

Muriel. (*a step down* c.) If you say it—yes.

Anstruther. (*throws piece of telegram away. Comes to her*) The whole thing seems brutal, I know. But that night I was excited, the orders for active service had come, I was mad with delight at the idea of going out. I—I'd even—been drinking. And you sat beside me, radiant, kind, good, full of sympathy and help for all of us. And there came from the flowers you were wearing a faint perfume that brought to my memory a woman that I used to care for, that I even loved. I lived for the moment; the flowers, the wine, your own goodness had played on my imagination.

Muriel. (*down* c., *her back to him*) And the perfume I was wearing reminded you of another woman.

Anstruther. Yes.

Muriel. Wakening some happy memory that had been asleep?

Anstruther. Yes.

Muriel. (*pause*) Was—she—good—and beautiful—this other woman?

Anstruther. It's past and done with. And it seems to me it doesn't matter now. (*goes down* R., *his back to her*)

Muriel. No; it doesn't matter now. Nothing does. I only wondered if she loved you.

Anstruther. What I've said, I've said to let you see that I am honestly saving you from a great unhappiness.

Muriel. Yes; I understand that. (*goes to him*) Is it all true?

Anstruther. A man would scarcely brand himself as I've done were it not.

Muriel. No; there would be no reason. Somehow, I can't keep my head very clear. (*comes down*- I think the strain—and Walter going—and this—and then the heat. You'll be glad of the fresh (*gets* L.) sea air. (*sits down* L.)

(Colonel *turns to box* C., *is about to take up helmet, stops, then*)

Anstruther. I want to ask you something—may I?

Muriel. Yes; ask me anything.

Anstruther. Did you mean to ask me to pay your brother's debts?

Muriel. Yes.

Anstruther. And that night, when I forgot

myself, were you then engaged to Kit—to Major Bingham?

Muriel. Yes, it's all quite true.

Anstruther. (c.) I'd have given Walter anything he asked, but it was better that—as luck had it—it should come from an old friend. I—I wonder will you go back to him?

Muriel. To Kit?

Anstruther. Yes.

Muriel. No—I couldn't—it wouldn't be decent. That isn't the right word, but I can't think. No, I've lived for two days—I couldn't go back to that.

Anstruther. (*eagerly*) For two days?

Muriel. Yes; just as you lived for that one short hour, lived with the wine and the perfume, and the memory of that "other" woman. You thought you saw them all incarnate in me, and then—when the fumes passed off—you died. So I, the woman that lived for these two days in a fever of waiting—waiting—waiting—so too that woman is dead.

Anstruther. (*coldly*) You have realized——

Muriel. (*rises*) I've realized that I was blind and in love with a phantom, just as once I was with a picture. (*crosses in front of him to up* r. *of* Colonel *above him*) I don't know why we're waiting here—you had no right to come into my life and ask me to give you all that a woman has to give, knowing that once given you would throw it aside to be trodden under foot by any gossip or passer by—to bring this story of wine and perfume and memory—— (*goes up*)

Anstruther. (*turns to her*) Muriel—is it possible that you——

Muriel. (*wildly*) Everything is possible once, but now you stand before me, (*sadly*) a picture defaced, a dream that hasn't come true. (*cries a little —fiercely*) Can't you see what you've done? I—I—never spoke like this in my life. I don't seem to be—even my wretched self. (*sobs*)

Anstruther. I will do anything you ask. God knows that's true, Muriel.

(*Buzz of voices heard off* R. *and* L.)

Muriel. Yes, it's true. For what I ask of *you*—is *nothing*. One of us must go. (*crosses to* L.) I can't breathe here, and I daren't go to the others. My face is burning—burning. (*cries*)

(*Bugle heard off.*)

Anstruther. (*takes helmet and gloves—comes to her*) Good-bye.

Muriel. Good-bye.

Anstruther. Won't you for the last time——

Muriel. (*looks at his hand*) No, I couldn't touch your hand.

(Trooper *comes from* L. *at back to* C., *takes up a case and exits* L.)

Anstruther. No, I deserve that. (*goes to* R.) Good-bye.

Muriel. I've said it once.

Anstruther. Yes, I forgot.

(*Enter* Bingham *down* R., *with letter.* Colonel *comes down to him. They shake.*)

Kit!

Bingham. Good-bye, sir—good luck.

(*Exit* Anstruther.)

Muriel, here's the letter I told you I'd write.

Muriel. What letter?

Bingham. Read it, and you'll see.

Voice. (*off* R.) Company, number.

(*Enter* Barker *and two* Officers.)

(*Bugle sounds.*)

Barker. Good-bye, Major; awfully sorry you're not coming with us.

1st Subaltern. But you'll follow us out, sir, won't you?

Bingham. Yes, yes, I'll try.

Barker. Of course!

(*Enter* Mannering, L. C.)

You'll get out, sir.

Mannering. Muriel—we're off.

Muriel. Walter!

Mannering. Come to the barrack square, and see the advance party marching out.

(*Exeunt.*)

Bingham. You'll be good boys, won't you? Remember you're serving in the finest regiment in the world. And be sure you take lots of cover and be good to the gees.

Chorus. Rather, sir! Right! Good-bye! Good-bye!

Bingham. She's read it! (*tears up letter. Bus.*)

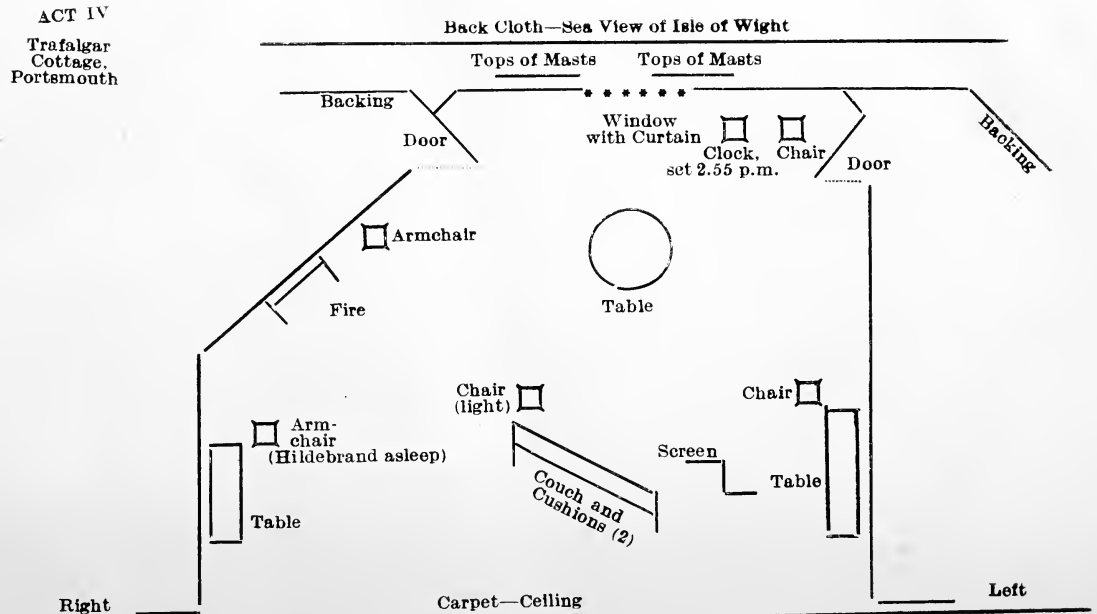
(*When* Bingham *sinks on box, his face in hands*)

CURTAIN.

TWO PICTURES.

ACT IV

Norah at door on right on rise of curtain, listening.
Lady Harburgh at left of table in centre *rolling bandages.*
Medicine ottles and glasses at *right of table in centre.*
Biscuit barrel on table up right.
Binks on entry goes to couch with assistance of Norah on left.
Book (*Lover's Leap*) on table in centre.
Binks' *left* foot in bandages and large slipper.
Binks' *left* arm in sling.
Victoria Cross and pin for Duke of Hull.
Kettle on fire (steaming) and spirit lamp.


ACT IV
Trafalgar Cottage, Portsmouth
Back Cloth—Sea View of Isle of Wight
Tops of Masts
Tops of Masts
Backing
Door
Window with Curtain
Clock, set 2.55 p.m.
Chair
Door
Backing
Armchair
Fire
Table
Chair (light)
Chair
Arm-chair (Hildebrand asleep)
Screen
Table
Couch and Cushions (2)
Table
Right
Carpet—Ceiling
Left

ACT IV.

A year elapses between Acts III and IV.

SCENE.—*Trafalgar Cottage, Portsmouth.*

(HILDEBRAND *is discovered asleep in armchair, above fireplace.* LADY HARBURGH *is discovered rolling bandages* C., *and* NORAH *is listening at door* R.)

NORAH. What are you doing?

BINGHAM. (*without*) It's all right, I'm dressing.

NORAH. You mustn't go doing things that you can't, you know; hadn't I better help you?

BINGHAM. No thanks, my man's doing everything.

NORAH. Let me know when you're ready, and I'll give you an arm in here.

BINGHAM. All right. I'll shout out presently.

LADY HARBURGH. Hildebrand's still asleep.

NORAH. He sleeps all day. Fancy Billy a sergeant! Just look at him. Sergeant the Honourable Hildebrand Carstairs—promoted on the field.

LADY HARBURGH. And still better, recommended for a commission.

NORAH. Aunt Agatha, aren't you proud?

LADY HARBURGH. Yes, dear, I am proud of him.

But the blood of the Maclachlans of the Hebrides was bound to come out.

Norah. Yes, it came out and stained the veldt.

Lady Harburgh. Ah! Poor boy! I try not to think of those awful days when we didn't dare to look at the morning or evening papers for fear of finding the name we loved. And the terrible night when at last we came on it unexpectedly, followed by the one word "severely." But that's all over. The room looks trim and tidy, doesn't it?

Norah. Yes; truly it was an inspiration to rent this dear old cottage, and take charge of our own beloved wounded the moment they touched the shore.

Lady Harburgh. Has Major Bingham had his beef-tea?

Norah. Yes, I gave it him half an hour ago. D'you know, Aunt, I can't imagine how he got out to South Africa.

Lady Harburgh. General Clayton told me it was because, broken-hearted at being left behind, he sat on the steps of the War Office for a week, till they actually sent him out to get rid of him.

Norah. And now just a year's gone, and he's back by the same hospital ship that brought Billy, but both so dreadfully battered.

Lady Harburgh. Poor fellows!

Norah. Both he and Billy were wildly excited when Muriel told them the trooper with the regiment came in this morning.

LADY HARBURGH. She's gone down to the quay, hasn't she? (*pours out medicine*)

(HILDEBRAND *stretches.*)

NORAH. Yes; to meet Walter. He won't be able to come here; both he and Mr. Barker are ordered to Colchester at once.

HILDEBRAND. (*yawns*) Where's—where's Norah?

NORAH. (*down on his* R.) Here I am, Billy dear!

HILDEBRAND. That's all right.

LADY HARBURGH. (*comes to* R. C. *with glass of medicine*) You've been asleep.

HILDEBRAND. I know. Can I have some chicken?

NORAH. Billy, you had a whole wing an hour ago.

HILDEBRAND. Had I? I feel almost empty.

LADY HARBURGH. You must wait till five o'clock.

HILDEBRAND. Can't I have a mug of beer?

NORAH. Beer? No!

LADY HARBURGH. No, certainly not! There—that's all you'll get—your medicine.

HILDEBRAND. It's such bitter stuff. Tastes like materialized morality.

LADY HARBURGH. Down with it! All of it!

HILDEBRAND. Am I looking better?

LADY HARBURGH. Yes, dear, I never saw you look so like a Maclachlan before.

HILDEBRAND. They must have been a seedy looking lot. I say, you know, the doctor said I was to get out into the sun to-day.

Lady Harburgh. Yes, dear, I'm going to take you to the garden. I'll go and put my things on now. Norah, you'll take care of Major Bingham.

Norah. Yes, aunt.

(*Exit* Lady Harburgh.)

Hildebrand. I say, Norah, quick! Let's have something to eat!

Norah. No, Billy, I daren't.

Hildebrand. I'm horribly hungry.

Norah. I know, dear, but——

Hildebrand. It's simply tearing me internally, and never forget that it's the little rift within the lute and so on.

Norah. Poor soul! Well, I know I oughtn't to—but I'll give you a biscuit—one, only one.

Hildebrand. That's a dear girl! Give me a big one!

Norah. There! (*gives him biscuit*)

Bingham. (*without*) What ho! I'm ready!

Norah. All right, I'm coming. (*goes through door for a moment*)

Hildebrand. There's awfully little sustenance in a biscuit. It seems to get lost.

(Norah *returns with* Major Bingham.)

Bingham. Well, young man?

Hildebrand. Well, sir.

Bingham. Why has he a biscuit?

Norah. He oughtn't to, but he would have it.

Bingham. Then I want one.

Norah. No, no! You're not to have any solid food to-day. The doctor said so.

Bingham. What had you for lunch?

Hildebrand. Chicken.

Bingham. Ah! I thought so; I sniffed it. I want to know why he gets these things, if I don't.

Norah. (*places* Bingham's *legs slowly on cushion on couch*) You know perfectly. Besides, you're to have some jelly in an hour.

Hildebrand. Am I?

Norah. (*rises*) No! (*takes other cushion round behind sofa*)

Hildebrand. Why is he to have jelly if I'm not?

Bingham. I like that. What about your chicken?

Hildebrand. That's past. I'm thinking of the future.

Norah. Oh, for goodness sake stop quarrelling about your food.

Hildebrand. Isn't that like her? For, mark you, she had pigeon pie and an apple soufflé for lunch.

Bingham. Pigeon pie and a soufflé! Can Heaven be so near. Tell me, little gourmet, what's the time?

Norah. (*looks at clock*) Nearly three o'clock. (*gets a book*, "*Lover's Leap*," *from table up* c.)

Bingham. Some of the regiment ought to be here soon.

Norah. Yes; so keep quiet till they come I'm

going to read to both of you till Aunt Agatha's ready (*sits* C. *at head of sofa*)

Bingham. That's capital.

Norah. It'll keep you quiet, anyhow. We're at chapter ten.

Bingham. I forget the name of the story.

Norah. It's *The Lover's Leap.*

Bingham. Ah, yes; of course.

Norah. Are you quite comfortable?

Bingham. Quite.

Hildebrand. I'm not.

(*Beckons to* Norah, *who brings her chair quietly over and sits* L. *of* Hildebrand.)

Bingham. Fire ahead!

Norah. Very well, then. You remember we left off where Roderick and Cynthia meet on the heather.

Bingham. Oh, she's always going up there.

Norah. (*reading*) "She stood gazing into his eyes, the sunlight turning her soft hair to a golden lustre. Scarce knowing what she did her arms crept round his neck. (*places her arms round* Hildebrand's *neck*) And in a moment as a wild and sudden blush leapt to her cheek, she kissed him passionately." (*kisses* Hildebrand)

Bingham. Is that all?

Norah. Oh no! I lost the place; that's all. Here it is! "And Roderick, what of him? A great joy shone in his raven eyes—

(HILDEBRAND *turns his eyes up.* NORAH *laughs.*) as gently he gathered her to him, and folded her in his arms."

(NORAH *and* HILDEBRAND *embrace. Pause.* BINGHAM *listens—then sits up, looks about, then turns and looks to* R., *sees them, and hides his face in soft cushions and laughs quietly. Looks up, then repeats bus.*)

BINGHAM. Just like that, I suppose.

(NORAH *and* HILDEBRAND *break apart.*)

Go on! I won't look round again. (*lays down again*)

NORAH. Hildebrand was a little tired, that's all. (*engrossed in book*)

HILDEBRAND. Yes, I feel awfully done up.

BINGHAM. So do I! And I want the same treatment.

(NORAH *stops reading, and pretends to be indignant.*) So come over here.

(*Enter* MURIEL.)

NORAH. (*rises*) Oh, here's Muriel. (*places book on table behind sofa*)

BINGHAM. Have you seen the regiment?

MURIEL. (*takes off hat*) Yes, and they're all in the wildest spirits. You'll see some of them presently. (*places hat on table down* L.)

BINGHAM. And you saw Graves, and old Tatters, and Walter, and Jellicoe?

Muriel. Yes. They're as cheery as possible, and all asking for you.

Norah. And Mr. Barker?

Muriel. Yes.

Hildebrand. Why drag in Barker? What does it matter about Barker? Barker wasn't wounded.

Muriel. Then I wentto the station with Walter, and saw him off to Colchester, and here I am. (*crosses in front to* R., *taking off her coat as she goes, and places it on table down* R.) Billy, your mother's ready. She says you're to go to her.

Hildebrand. (*rising*) Come on then, Norah.

Norah. Gently—don't make a fuss. (*as she helps* Hildebrand) You're so ridiculously pleased at being an invalid.

Hildebrand. I do hope that the fresh air won't give more of an appetite. I've got such a lot already. I say, Norah, do I look interesting?

Norah. Yes, awfully.

(Hildebrand *and* Norah *exeunt.*)

Muriel. The Duke of Hull went on board.

Bingham. Oh! By Jove!

Muriel. And made a little speech.

Bingham. Did he really?

Muriel. Every one was delighted.

Bingham. I should think so.

Muriel. They say he's coming here later on.

Bingham. Here?

Muriel. Yes; by special request.

Bingham. Oh, but——

Muriel. To see you two invalids.

Bingham. It can't be——

Muriel. I dare say it's only a rumour.

Bingham. Oh, sure to be.

Muriel. Still, I've an idea he'll come.

Bingham. Tell me, did you see Colonel Anstruther?

Muriel. No; he was busy in the saloon, signing disembarkation returns and all sorts of things. And I—I kept out of his way.

Bingham. I wish you hadn't. D'you know this is the first time we've been alone together since I came here?

Muriel. Is it really?

Bingham. Yes, the first time. And I want to tell you something.

Muriel. Kit, not the old——

Bingham. No, no! Good heavens, no! That's all over. No! It's this. I've found out from little things you've said that you never read my letter, my confession.

Muriel. I didn't want to.

Bingham. The gist of it was that I had kept you two—you and Miles—apart.

Muriel. You, Kit?

Bingham. Yes. It's as true as that the sun is shining there on the Isle of Wight. I told a lie—yes, it's a horrid low word, but we can't get away from it; I led Miles to believe that you loved me

I believed you meant to marry him only to save Walter. And I kept saying to myself, "All's fair in Love and War." But now that I've been through both I know that, like most proverbs, it's only true in exception, not in rule.

Muriel. But there was "another" woman——

Bingham. No, no, there wasn't. She was invented to give you a pretext for throwing him over.

Muriel. Kit, you don't mean that he—he loves me?

Bingham. There never was a man who loved a woman as he loves you, unless perhaps—— (*turns away, twirls moustache*)

Muriel. Yes?

Bingham. A poor devil they call Binks.

Muriel. Kit! (*extends her left hand*)

Bingham. (*takes her hand in his right*) It's all right. Don't worry. That book was closed long ago. It's on the shelf, and the dust is gathering already. But I've lain awake for hours every night of the year that has gone, sick with pain—a pain that gave me no rest—to think that I, Kit Bingham, could be guilty of the lie I told! I was mad. It was the slip of a moment and then I hadn't the pluck to confess. But, Muriel, I told him——

Muriel. You told him?

Bingham. Yes, one night on the veldt. It was a hot, airless night, and I was parched, I had a touch of fever. He woke, saw me tumbling and tossing, so he got up, went to the river and fetched me a

canteen of cool water. I remember so well, the dusty grass, the dry throat, and a great vulture that flapped up to the sky with an angry screech as Miles came back to the tent. There had been a big fight the day before. What a drink it was! I sucked down the muddy water like a vampire. And then, with only the moonlight that poured in through the gap of the tent as witness, I told him everything.

ANSTRUTHER. (*heard off* L.) What! Upstairs? Oh, all right, I'll find it.

BINGHAM. Listen! That's his voice below.

MURIEL. Yes, yes, (*rises*) I hear!

(*Places chair up a little, goes to* R. *of table* C.; *places work down.*

BINGHAM. He's coming! Muriel, quick! do me a favour. Tell him I'm asleep when he comes into the room.

MURIEL. Asleep?

BINGHAM. Yes; I'd give all I have in the world to hear your reconciliation.

MURIEL. But, Kit——

BINGHAM. Ah, promise! I'll only eavesdrop for a moment. Hush! here he is! I'm a sick man, humour me.

(*Enter* COLONEL ANSTRUTHER.)

ANSTRUTHER. Miss Mannering.

MURIEL. Yes, welcome home.

ANSTRUTHER. You mean that—honestly?

MURIEL. Yes, indeed I mean it.

Anstruther. Then it's worth a year's absence to hear it. (*awkward pause, then sees* Bingham) Why, surely—that's Kit.

Muriel. Yes, he's getting on splendidly. It's only the left foot that gives a little trouble.

Anstruther. He's asleep.

Muriel. Well, yes—he "*seems*" to be.

Anstruther. Shall I wake him?

Muriel. No, you can't do that.

Anstruther. No, poor soul. I suppose he wants all the rest possible. What an ideal hospital you've made.

Muriel. Yes, isn't it nice. (*pause*) Won't you sit down?

(Anstruther *sits below fire.* Muriel *above* R *Pause.* Muriel *looks shyly over to* Bingham.)

Had you a good passage home?

Anstruther. Yes, very; a bit rough in the bay.

Muriel. (*pause*) And now the regiment goes to Colchester.

Anstruther. Yes—a dull place, they tell me.

Muriel. Yes; so I believe.

Anstruther. Hem! Hem!

Muriel. You must have been through some terrible experience during the year that is gone?

Anstruther. You mean the war? (*rises, stands by fire*)

Muriel. Yes.

Anstruther. Ah, yes, indeed. Mercifully, physical fatigue and routine, and a life of unceasing watchfulness leave little time for thinking. (*crosses to up* c.) Yet now—here—it all seems like a story I read long ago, and have already half forgotten.

Muriel. We must help you to forget it altogether.

Anstruther. Yes, you can do a great deal in that way. (*comes to her*)

Muriel. Can I ?

Anstruther. (*kneels and takes her hand*) Muriel, there's no good beating about the bush. I can't do it. With every turn of the screw that sent us home over six thousand miles of sea, I've been dreaming of this—this home-coming.

Muriel. Miles !

Anstruther. I meant well, Muriel, but I was a brute.

Muriel. No, no, you weren't. Kit has told me all that happened.

Anstruther. And everything's forgiven ?

Muriel. (*rises*) There is nothing to forgive. It was all a misunderstanding. (*he kisses her hand*)

Anstruther. (*rises*) My darling !

Muriel. Miles ! I knew somehow that things would come right. Miles, look at the sunlight over the sea.

Anstruther. Yes.

Muriel. But the sunshine here, in this room——

Anstruther. Is far, far stronger.

Muriel. Yes.

ANSTRUTHER. And it's all thanks to Kit.

MURIEL. To Kit? How?

(ANSTRUTHER *goes and looks over sofa.* MURIEL *goes to fire.* ANSTRUTHER *returns to above her.*)

ANSTRUTHER. Hush!

MURIEL. Tell me.

(BINGHAM *bangs the edge of couch with annoyance.*)

ANSTRUTHER. We were carrying out a flank manœuvre at Klipberg under heavy fire and gallop-hard to gain a kopje on the enemy's left. Suddenly my horse dropped under me like a rabbit, catching my leg under his ribs. I was dead stunned. After a time I heard some one galloping up to me—it was Kit. He had turned back and ridden through a hail of lead. He got me free, threw me across his own saddle, and off we tore. As we went, one shot struck his foot and two others caught him on the left arm.

MURIEL. Miles!

ANSTRUTHER. Then, as we dashed over the veldt panting and jolting for dear life, I heard him murmur, "It's for her, for Muriel; I'm bringing him back to her."

MURIEL. He never told me a word of this.

ANSTRUTHER. No; and he wanted to keep it quiet. I was too ill at first to report anything, and so it got into neither despatches nor newspaper. It happened close on dusk and only two or three men saw it. But there's a surprise in store for Kit.

Muriel. Is there? Wait a minute.

(*Crosses to* c. Anstruther *turns to fire.* Muriel *shakes her finger at* Bingham, *then goes to above* Anstruther, r.)

Then speak low; tell me.

Anstruther. (*below* r.) When I was fit again I reported the matter privately to the General, and he recommended Kit for the Victoria Cross.

(Bingham *swells his chest with pleasure and clutche side of couch.*)

Muriel. (*above* r.) Miles! How splendid! I knew he'd do something great. It was in him and bound to come out. Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage.

Bingham. Don't they? Just you ask the average burglar.

Anstruther. Hulloa! He's awake.

(*They come to him with their hands entwined.* Muriel *goes at back of sofa to down* l. Anstruther *goes to head of sofa.*)

Bingham. No, I'm not, I'm only delirious.

Anstruther. Here! Wake up! Don't talk rot!

Bingham. Hallo, old chap! (*sits up*) How are you?

(*They shake hands.*)

Anstruther. (*helps* Bingham *up*) Kit, you rogue. You've been awake all the time.

Bingham. (*holding* Anstruther's *hand*) No, I've been dreaming. I dreamt that I was at a wedding, and you were the bridegroom. For a time I insisted that I was that official, but we found out eventually that I was only the best man.

Anstruther. Kit! (*shakes hands*)

(*Enter* Lady Harburgh, Hildebrand *and* Norah.)

Lady Harburgh. Colonel Anstruther. How delightful. But there isn't a moment to spare, even to welcome you. The Duke of Hull is coming to see the patients. He's in the garden now. There, sit there, Hildebrand. Norah, tidy his hair.

Bingham. (*hands cushion to* Muriel, *who places it under his arm* L.) Can't I go away? I'm such a fool at a function.

Muriel. No, of course you can't.

(*Enter* 1st A.D.C.)

A.D.C. His Royal Highness! (*spoken quietly*)

(*Enter* Duke of Hull *and* 2nd A.D.C.)

Duke. My dear Lady Harburgh, and these, I suppose, are your ministering angels.

Lady Harburgh. It is very good of your Royal Highness to come. (*steps up* R. C.)

Duke. On the contrary, it is a very great pleasure. What a charming hospital. Is this your son?

Lady Harburgh. Yes, sir.

Duke. You're getting on well, I hear.

Hildebrand. Yes, thank you, sir.

Duke. It is a great pleasure to me to tell you

that the King signed your commission this morning.

Hildebrand. Oh, sir!

Duke. And I trust you will long be spared to serve your country as gallantly as you have done.

(Hildebrand *goes up to window talking with* Norah. Duke *comes to* Bingham. Bingham *rises with the assistance of* Muriel *and* Anstruther.)

Duke. And this is Major Bingham. No, please don't move. I won't have you attempt to stand.

Bingham. But, sir——

Duke. It is my wish. The King has sent by me a little gift. It's perhaps unusual to give it so informally, especially as you can't even wear uniform at present, but His Majesty thought that possibly bestowing it now might have as an invigorating an effect as a great quantity of medicine. So I'm going to pin it on your left breast. No, I've already told you not to move. There! (*pins medal on* Bingham.) The Victoria Cross, and the King desires me to express his fervent hope that you may long be spared to wear it.

Bingham. I—I can't speak, sir.

Duke. I quite understand. Good-bye—— (*takes* Bingham's *hand*) I shall hope to hear of your speedy recovery.

Bingham. Good-bye, sir. (*shakes hands*)

Duke. (*goes up* R. C. *to* Lady Harburgh) Good-bye, Lady Harburgh. (*goes to* L. C., *bows to* Muriel, *takes cap and stick from* A.D.C., *goes to* L.) This, I

think, is the way. (*going, takes hat, etc., from* A.D.C.)

ANSTRUTHER. (*opening door*) Allow me, sir.

DUKE. Good-bye, Colonel. (*shakes hands*)

(*Exeunt* DUKE *and* A.D.C.'s, *followed by* LADY HARBURGH, NORAH *and* HILDEBRAND.)

(ANSTRUTHER *and* MURIEL *stand at back and watch* BINGHAM.)

BINGHAM. The Victoria Cross! I wish—I wish I wish I were worth it.

(ANSTRUTHER *comes down to back of couch* L. C. MURIEL *comes down* L. *to front, kneels and grasps* BINGHAM'S *hand.* ANSTRUTHER *grasps his other hand.*)

CURTAIN.

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